BRUTAL NATURE

OMNIBUS

LUCIANO SARACINO • ARIEL OLIVETTI

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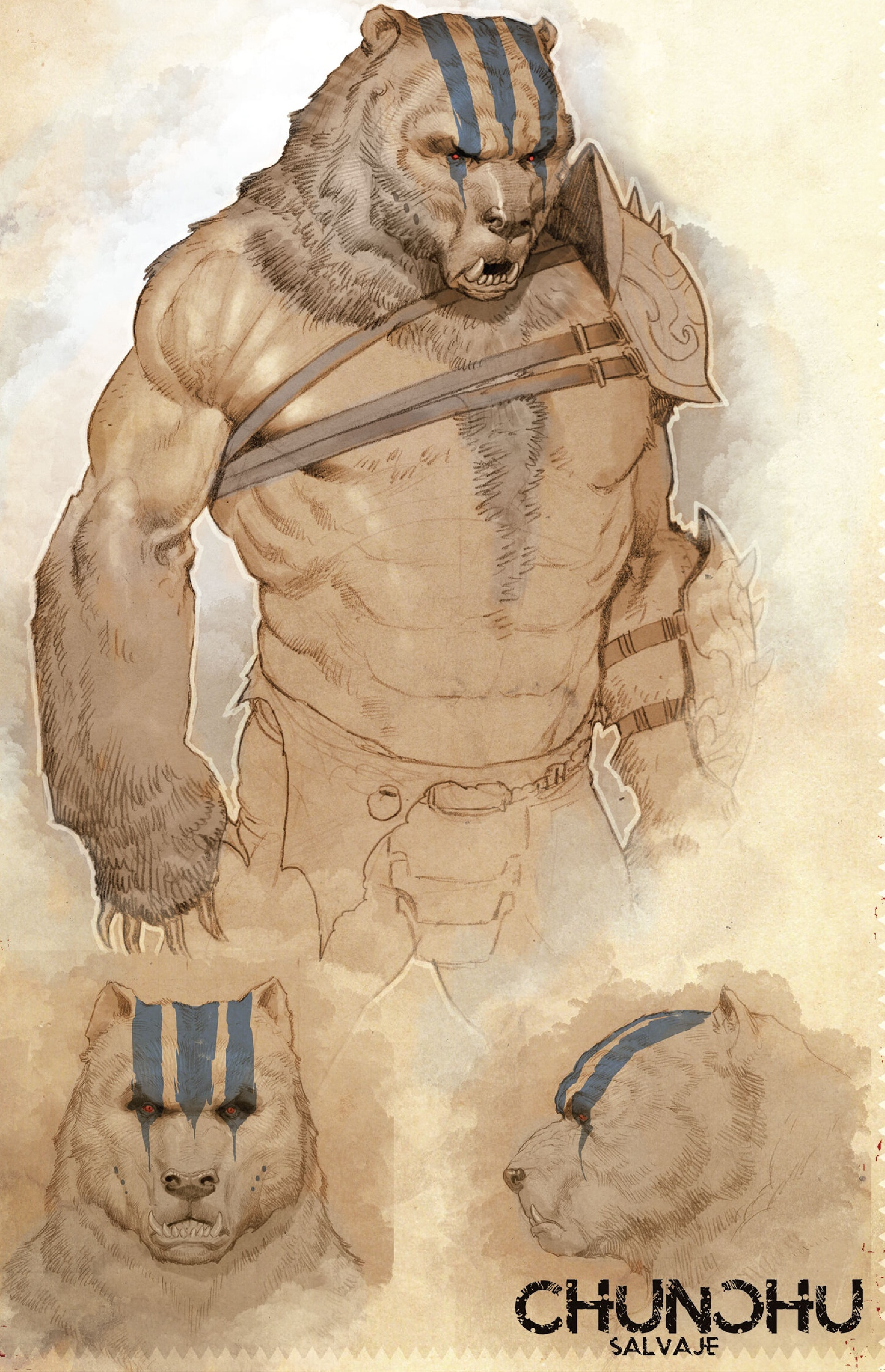
BRUTAL
NATURE


CHUNCHU
SALVAJE

The jungle smells of green.
Of the roar of jaguars. Of the bellow of plants at birth. Of the song of every bird that breaks the silence.
CRACK

And of fear.
The jungle also smells of fear.
WE THOUGHT YOU WERE NEVER GOING TO STOP RUNNING, OUR BELOVED LADY.
PLEASE... I...
HAS NO ONE TOLD YOU THAT IT IS NOT GOOD TO UPSET THE EXECUTOR OF YOUR DEATH? WE CAN BE GENTLE AND FAST OR WE CAN TAKE OUR TIME... WHAT WILL YOU DECIDE, YOUR MAJESTY?
YOU CAN ALL LEAVE. THE JUNGLE WILL FORGIVE YOU IF...
"THE JUNGLE?"

DO YOU SERIOUSLY BELIEVE THAT THE JUNGLE WILL SEND A SPIRIT OR ONE OF THOSE CRAZY THINGS TO DEFEND YOU? I KNEW THAT THE INHABITANTS OF THESE LANDS WERE FOOLS... BUT I NEVER IMAGINED HOW FOOLISH YOU WOULD TRULY BE.
AS YOU CAN SEE, MAIDEN, YOUR BELOVED JUNGLE HAS SENT ONLY A BATTALION OF MOSQUITOES TO DEFEND YOU. AND NOW...
AHHHHH!
WHAT THE...?

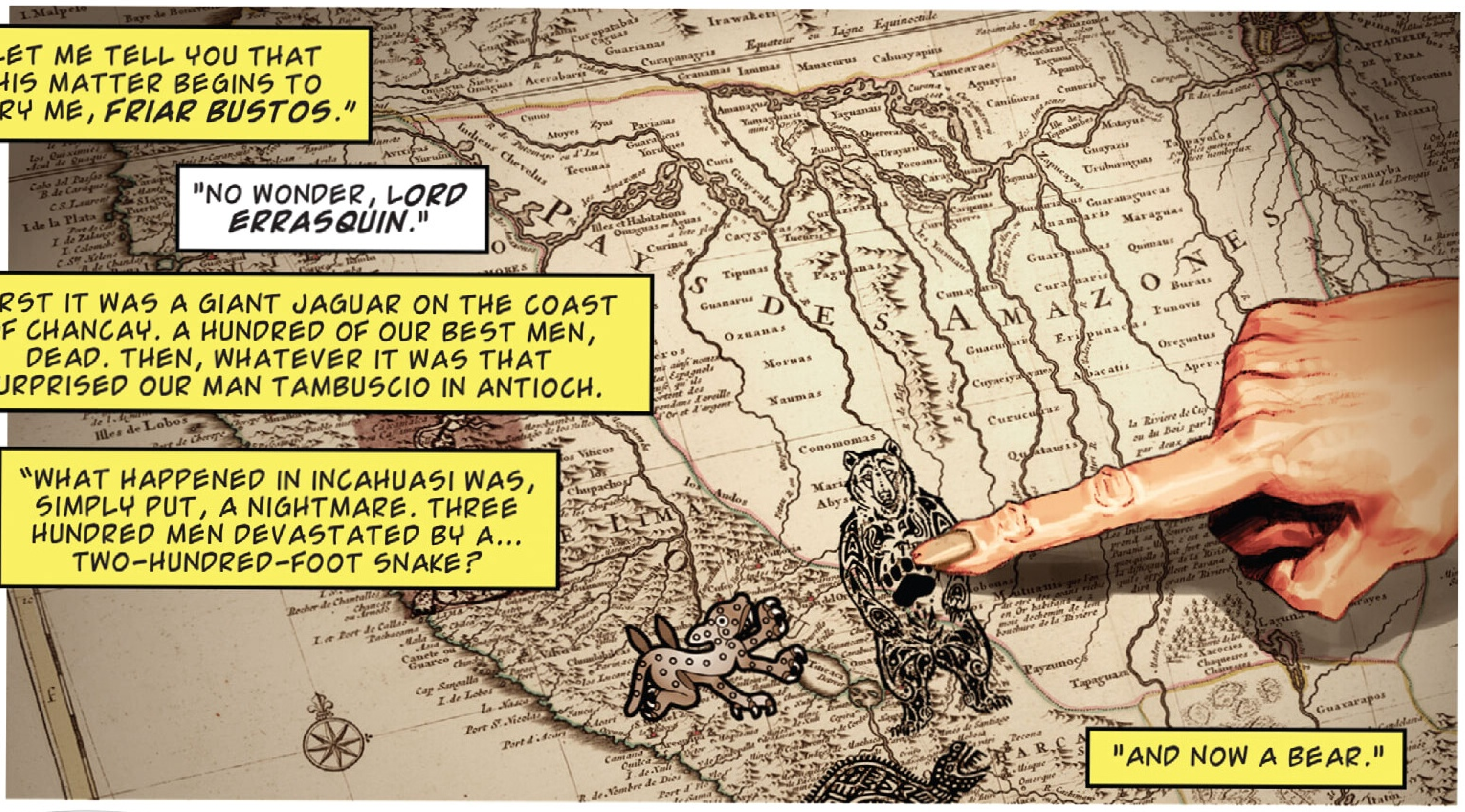
CROAAAAAAAAR
STUMP
CRACK
The jungle smells of urine.
Of hypocrisy.
Of blood.

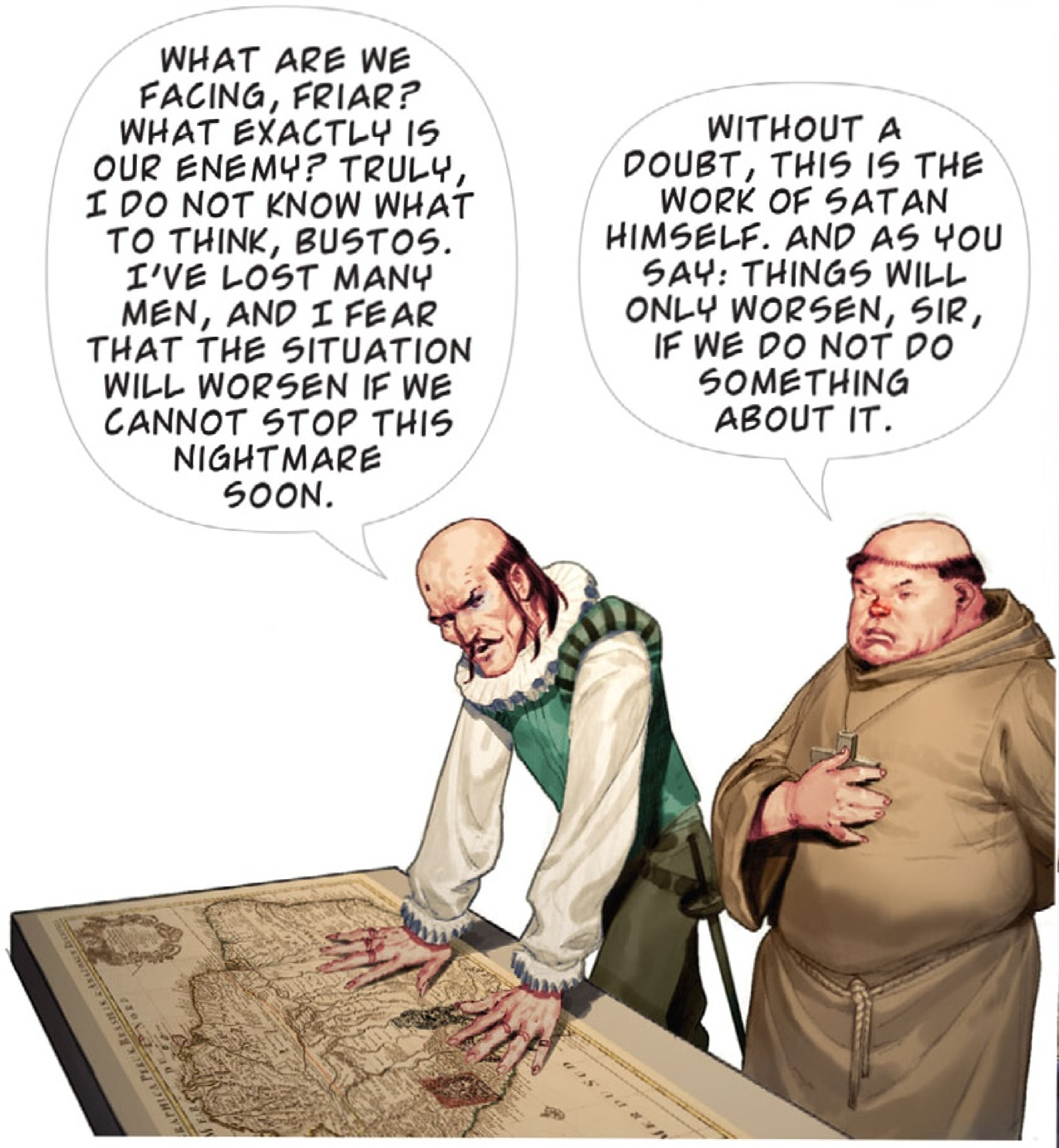
And of hope.
ARE YOU...
...THE JUNGLE?
"FEAR NOT."
THEY HAVE GONE.
"REST".
THEY WILL NOT RETURN.

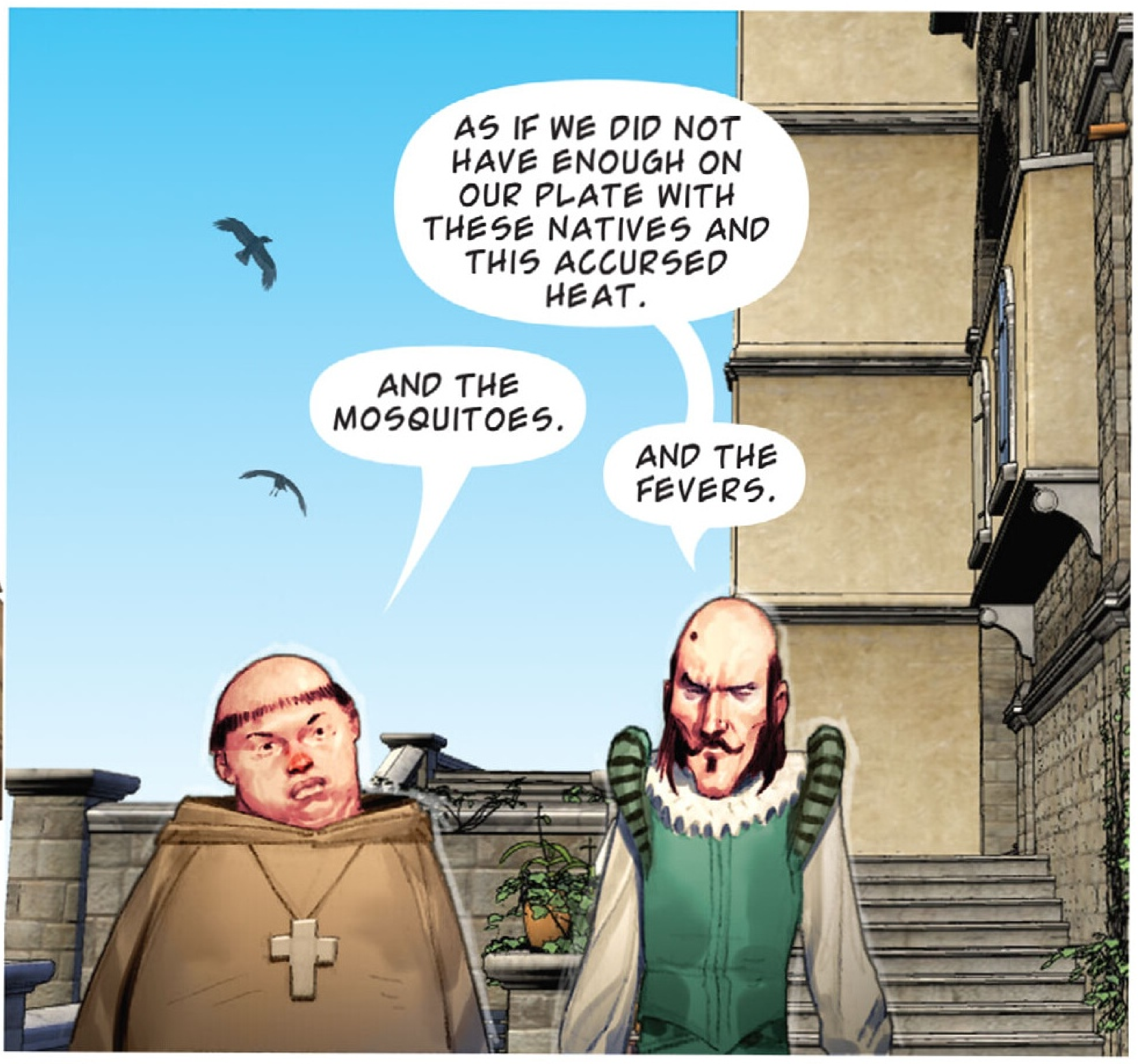
The new men do not feel at home surrounded by the green.
The green hides too many mysteries that they cannot interpret with their faithless books.
That is why they have opened holes in the jungle.
And they return to those holes whenever the green scratches that which they call a soul.

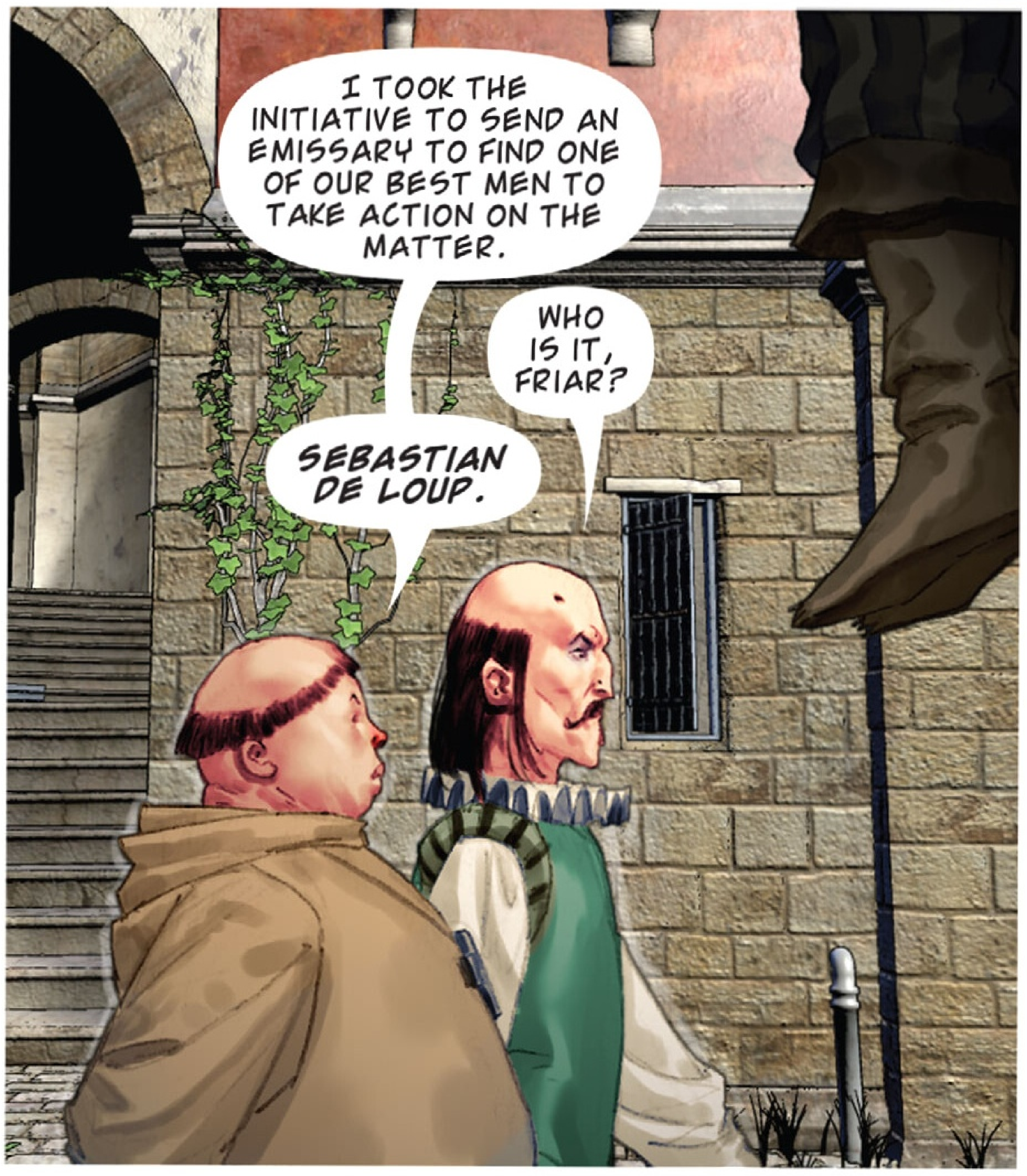
And they let those holes swallow them up.
They feel safe in those holes.
And that's where they allow themselves to sleep...
...to dream their dreamless dreams.

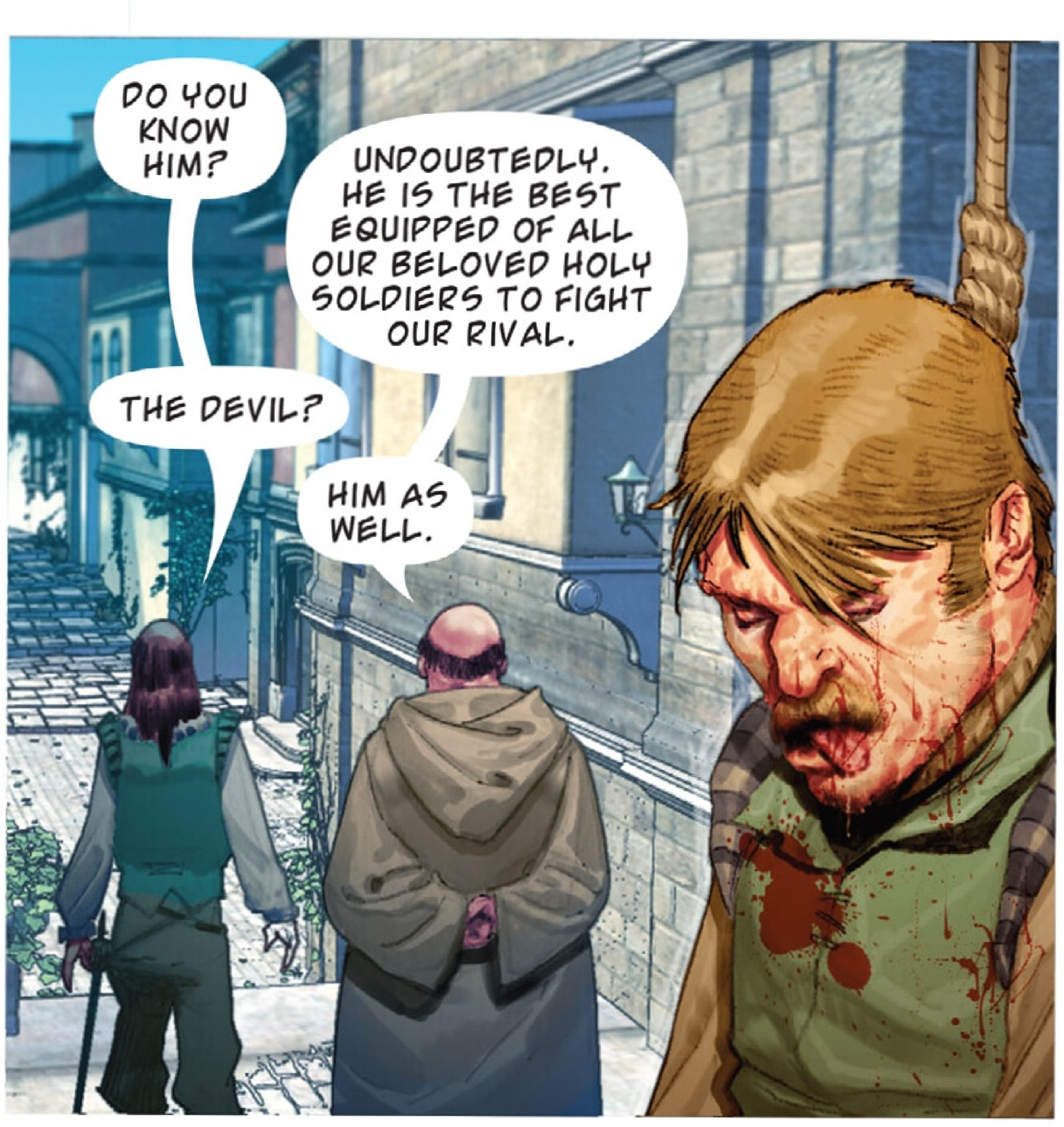
COULD YOU PLEASE REPEAT YOUR STORY, IF IT'S NOT TOO MUCH TO ASK?
WELL... YOU SEE... I... WE... WE WERE CHASING A GIR... A WARRIOR! A DANGEROUS WARRIOR HAD ESCAPED OUR GRASP AND FLED THROUGH THE JUNGLE.
BUT AN ENORMOUS BEAR CAME OUT OF THE BUSHES AND KILLED THEM ALL... EXCEPT FOR THE GIR... THE WARRIOR. AND ME, I MANAGED TO ESCAPE AFTER A COURAGEOUS STRUGGLE.
THAT'S ENOUGH.
SO YOU'RE SAYING THAT A BEAR ATTACKED YOU IN THIS LAND WHERE THERE ARE NO BEARS.
THE LARGEST BEAR YOU HAVE EVER HEARD MENTIONED, MY LORD.
WELL THEN YOU HAVE REASON TO REST. YOU ARE DISMISSED.
AND PLEASE...
...TAKE CARE THAT NO ONE ELSE HEARS THIS STORY AGAIN.


"LET ME TELL YOU THAT THIS MATTER BEGINS TO WORRY ME, **FRIAR BUSTOS**."
"NO WONDER, **LORD ERRASQUIN**."
"FIRST IT WAS A GIANT JAGUAR ON THE COAST OF CHANCAY. A HUNDRED OF OUR BEST MEN, DEAD. THEN, WHATEVER IT WAS THAT SURPRISED OUR MAN TAMBUSCIO IN ANTIOCH.
"WHAT HAPPENED IN INCAHUASI WAS, SIMPLY PUT, A NIGHTMARE. THREE HUNDRED MEN DEVASTATED BY A... TWO-HUNDRED-FOOT SNAKE?
"AND NOW A BEAR."


WHAT ARE WE FACING, FRIAR? WHAT EXACTLY IS OUR ENEMY? TRULY, I DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO THINK, BUSTOS. I'VE LOST MANY MEN, AND I FEAR THAT THE SITUATION WILL WORSEN IF WE CANNOT STOP THIS NIGHTMARE SOON.
WITHOUT A DOUBT, THIS IS THE WORK OF SATAN HIMSELF. AND AS YOU SAY: THINGS WILL ONLY WORSEN, SIR, IF WE DO NOT DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

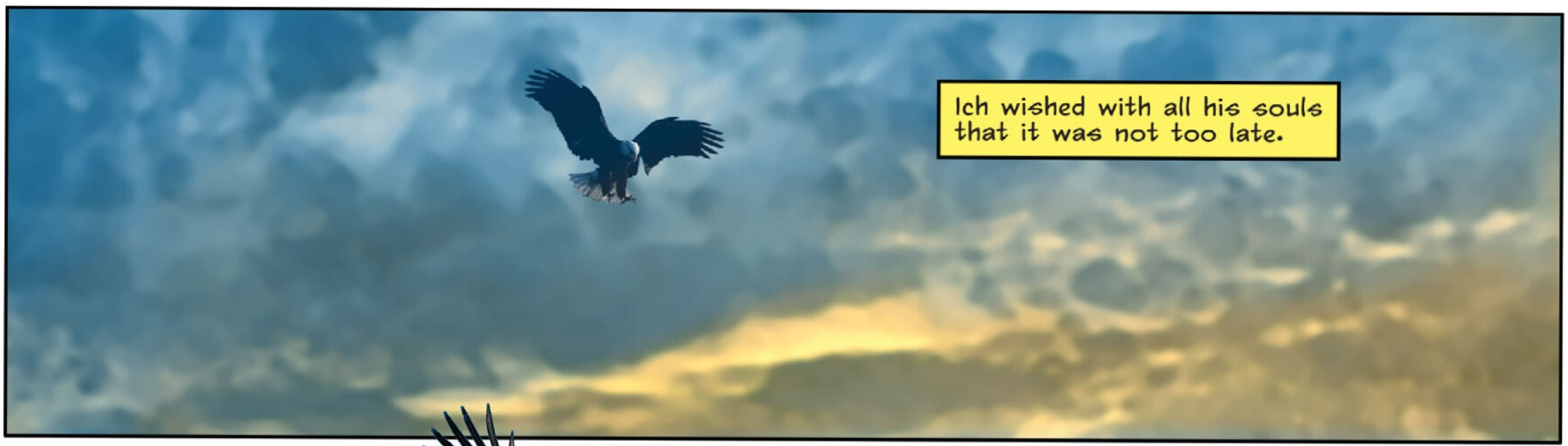

AS IF WE DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH ON OUR PLATE WITH THESE NATIVES AND THIS ACCURSED HEAT.
AND THE MOSQUITOES.
AND THE FEVERS.

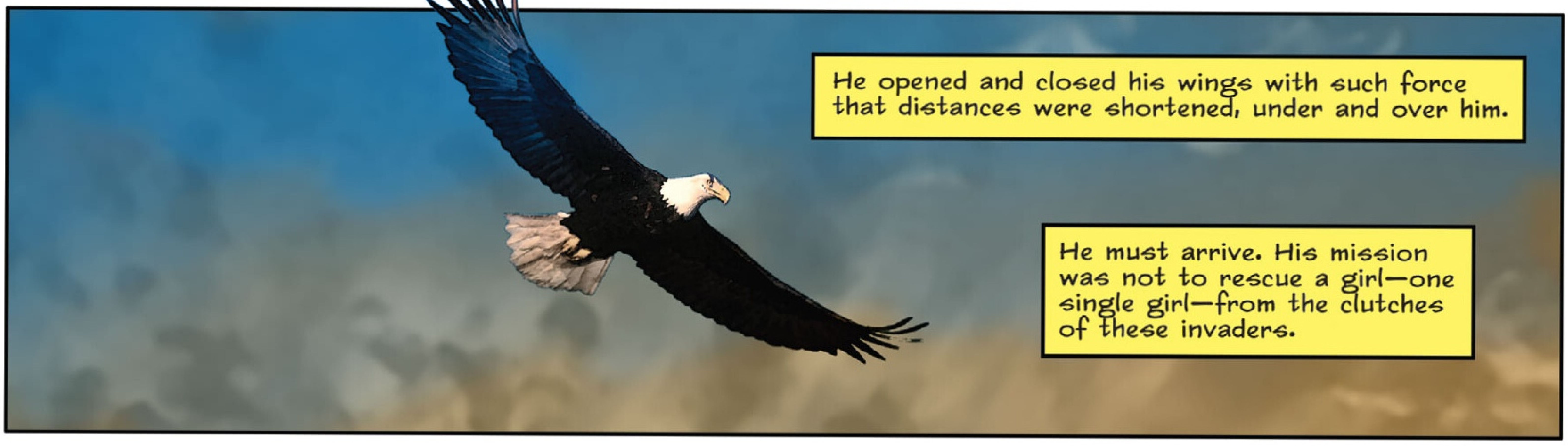

I TOOK THE INITIATIVE TO SEND AN EMISSARY TO FIND ONE OF OUR BEST MEN TO TAKE ACTION ON THE MATTER.
WHO IS IT, FRIAR?
SEBASTIAN DE LOUP.

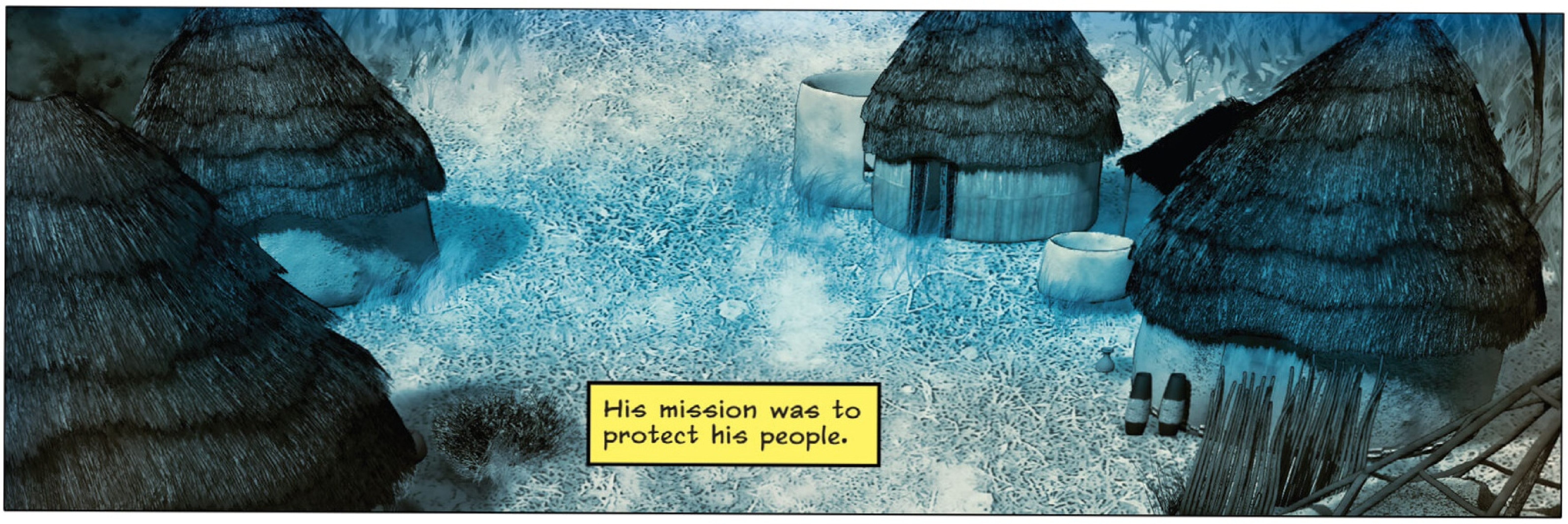

DO YOU KNOW HIM?
UNDOUBTEDLY. HE IS THE BEST EQUIPPED OF ALL OUR BELOVED HOLY SOLDIERS TO FIGHT OUR RIVAL.
THE DEVIL?
HIM AS WELL.

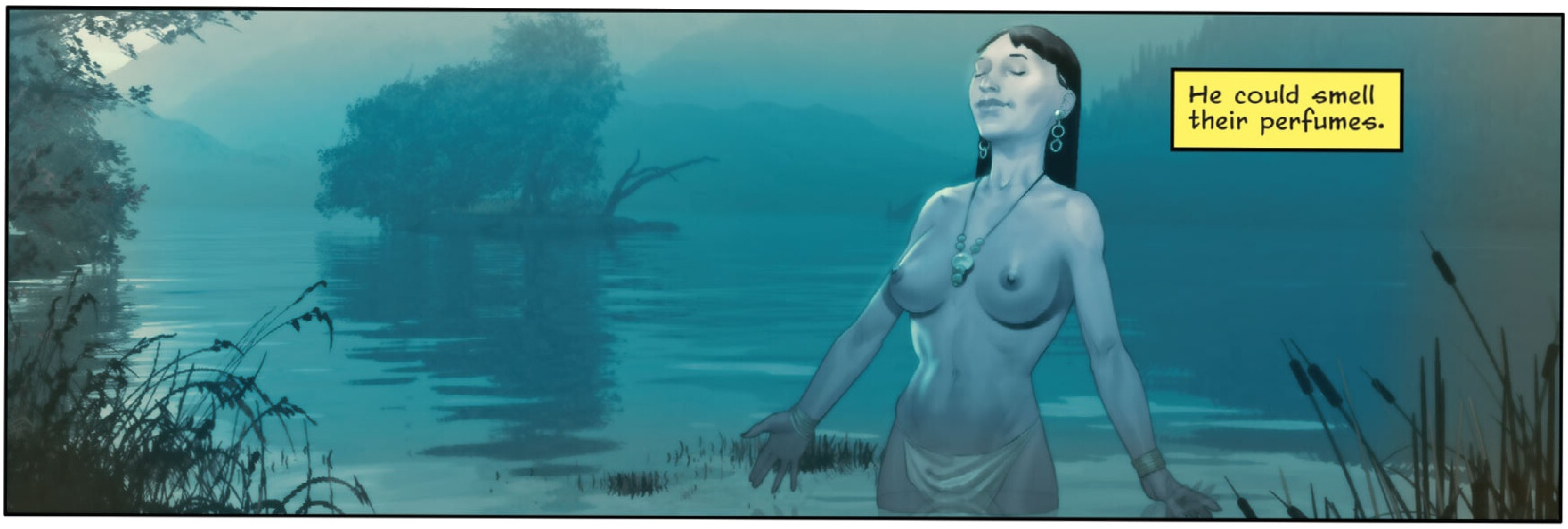
Pain, sooner or later, ends up leaving.
And the eyes, though the light may hurt, reopen.
DO YOU ALWAYS CRY WHEN YOU SLEEP?
I DO NOT KNOW... I...
DO NOT STRAIN YOURSELF. YOU HAVE NOT STOOD UP FOR DAYS. THE WOUND WAS TOO DEEP.
WHO ARE YOU?
MY NAME IS *YARETZI*. IT MEANS "SHE THAT WILL ALWAYS BE LOVED."
MY NAME IS *ICH*.
"IT MEANS 'MASK'."

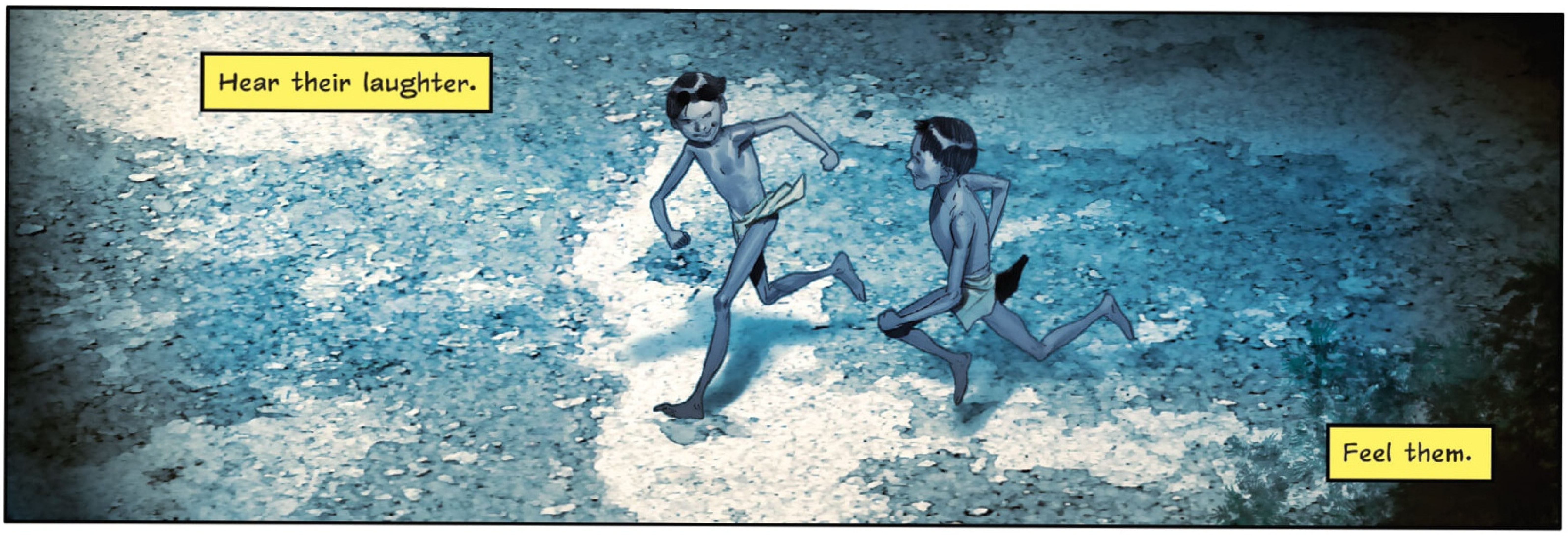
I HAVE HEALED. YOU'VE TAKEN GOOD CARE OF ME. ARE YOU A...?
"WHAT DID YOU GIVE ME?"
DO NOT ATTEMPT TO SPEAK OF THAT WHICH YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND, ICH. I ONLY KNOW A FEW SECRETS OF THE JUNGLE, AND I USED THEM TO HEAL YOU.
BOBINZANA TO PREVENT WOUND CONTAMINATION AND COPAIBA TO HEAL IT. CAMALONGA FOR YOU TO REGAIN ENERGY. AND COPORO HEAD SOUP SO THAT YOU NEVER FORGET ME.
NOW YOU MUST GO. YOU TOLD ME IN YOUR SLEEP.
I AM EXPECTED. I CANNOT BE LATE AGAIN.
WILL YOU RETURN?
NO. BUT I APPRECIATE EVERYTHING YOU HAVE DONE FOR ME.
"GOODBYE...
"...YARETZI."


Ich wished with all his souls that it was not too late.


He opened and closed his wings with such force that distances were shortened, under and over him.
He must arrive. His mission was not to rescue a girl—one single girl—from the clutches of these invaders.


His mission was to protect his people.

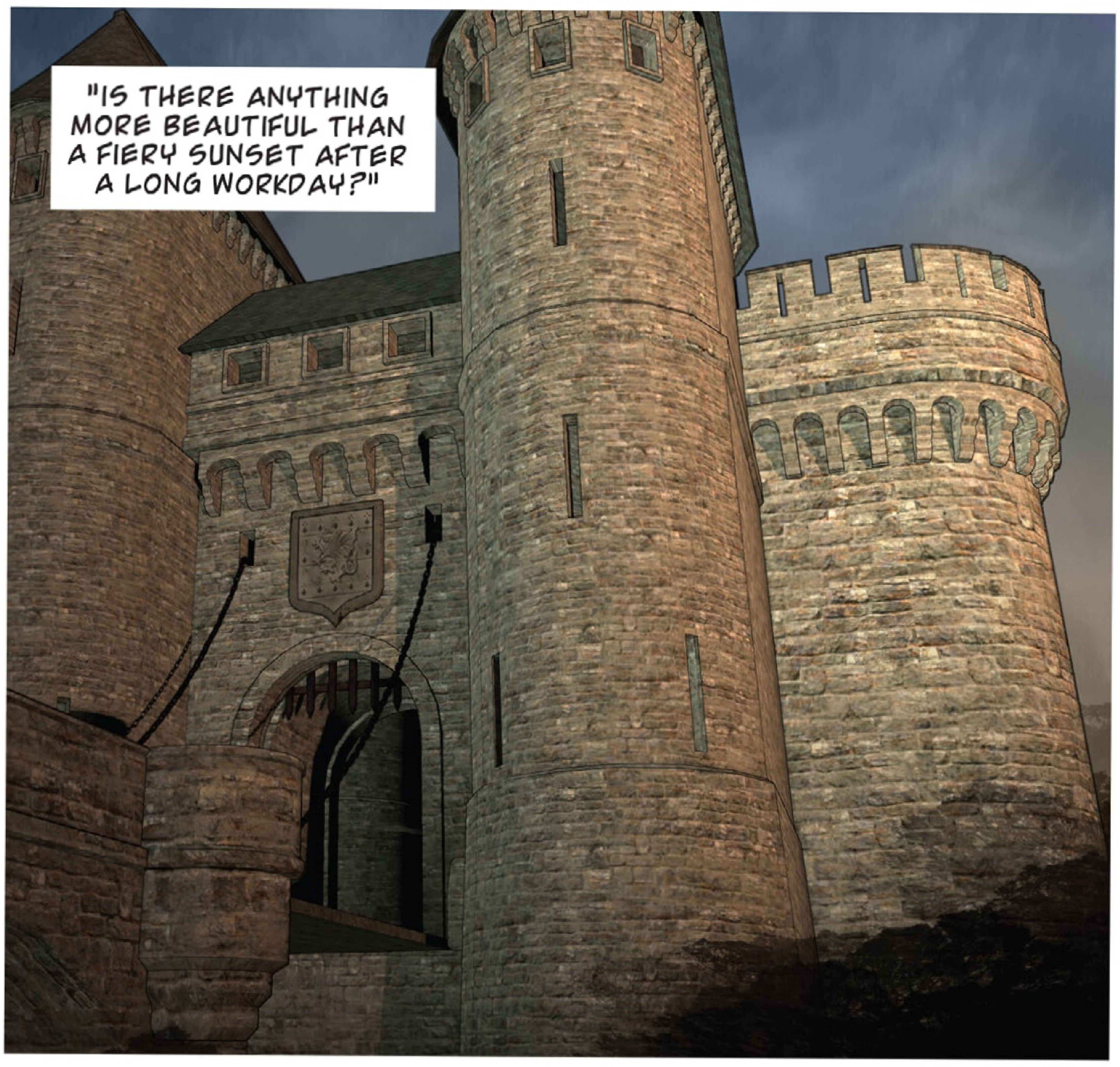

He could smell their perfumes.

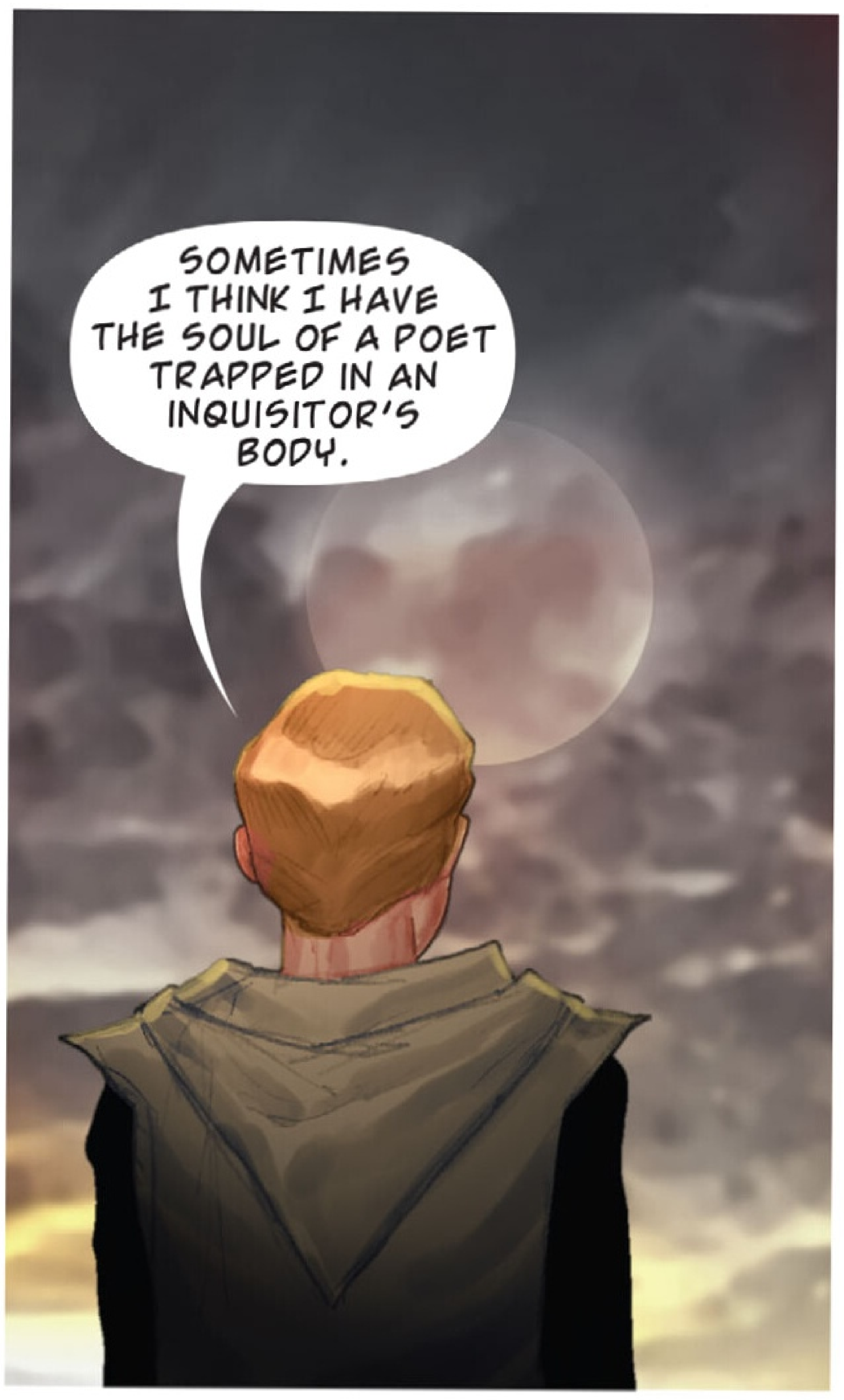

Hear their laughter.
Feel them.

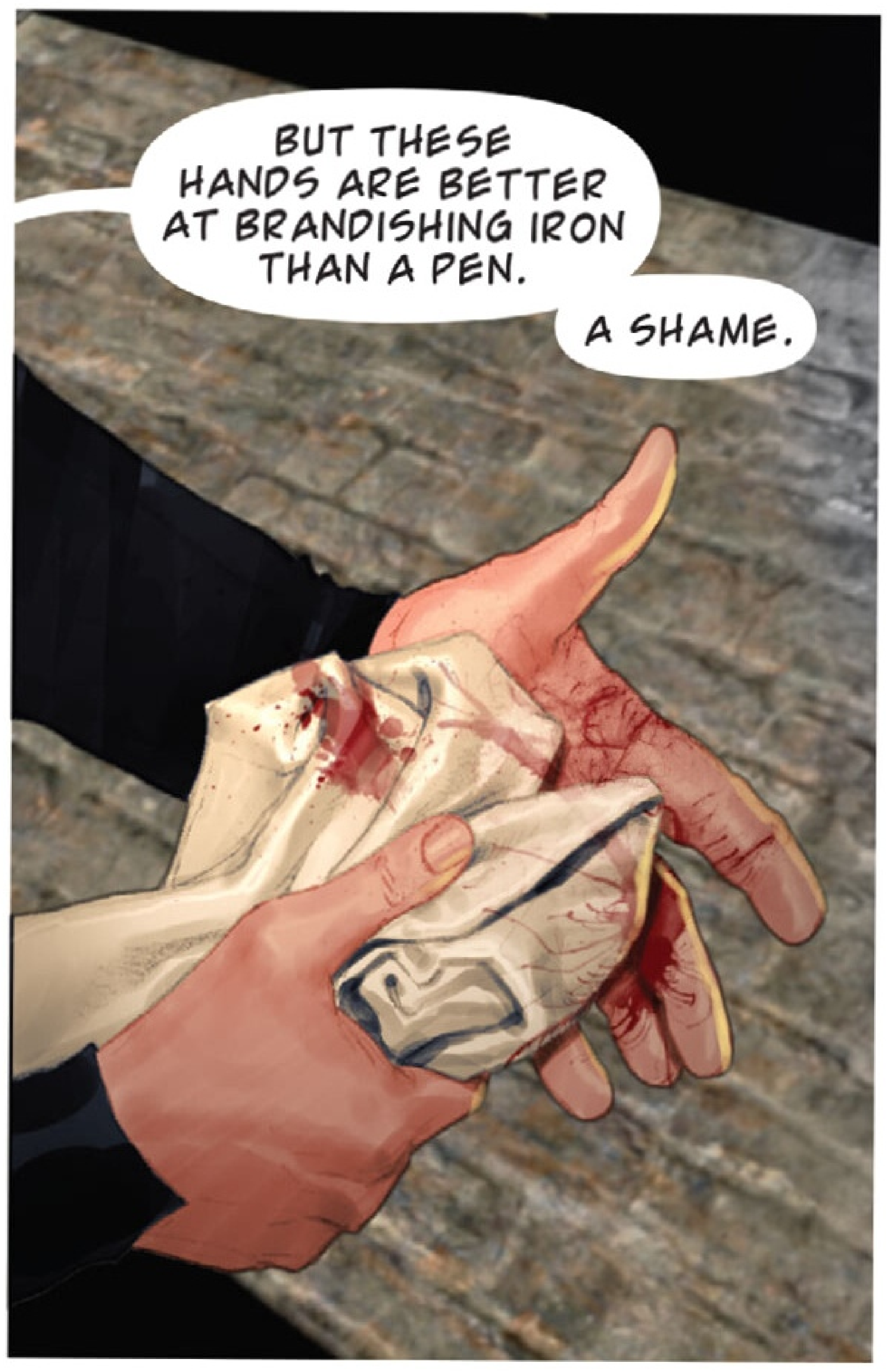
And he could also see *them* arrive.
Each new boat, new cries.
New atrocities.
The new world dies.
New clouds singing tragic stories.
Something inside Ich shouted at him to go no closer.
The sky smells like the end.
He was too late.
He heard the cry of a single girl in the jungle and stopped to help. He was wounded in the fight. He lost days. Many moons.
Now whatever had once been was no more.
Now whatever could have been will no longer be.
He was too late.

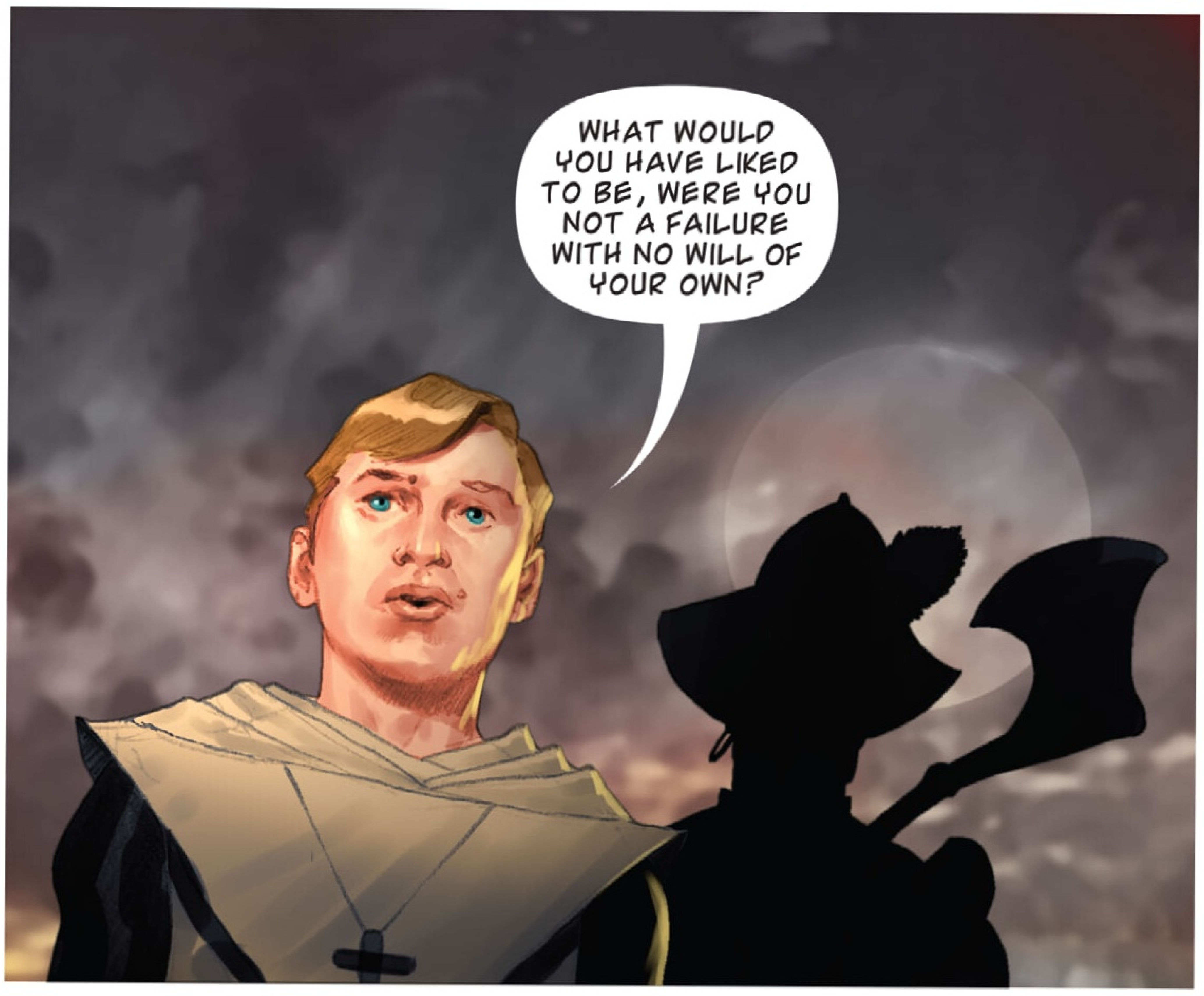
"THIS IS NO TIME TO MOURN. NO, NO, NO.
"THIS IS A TIME TO TALK, *CLARA GEISSERLIN*. LEAVE THE CRYING FOR THOSE THAT CAN GAIN SOMETHING FROM THEIR TEARS."
"I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOU ALL I KNOW! I'M INNOCENT!"
"INNOCENT? HERE, INNOCENCE HAS BEEN LOST FOR CENTURIES. YOU KNOW THIS."

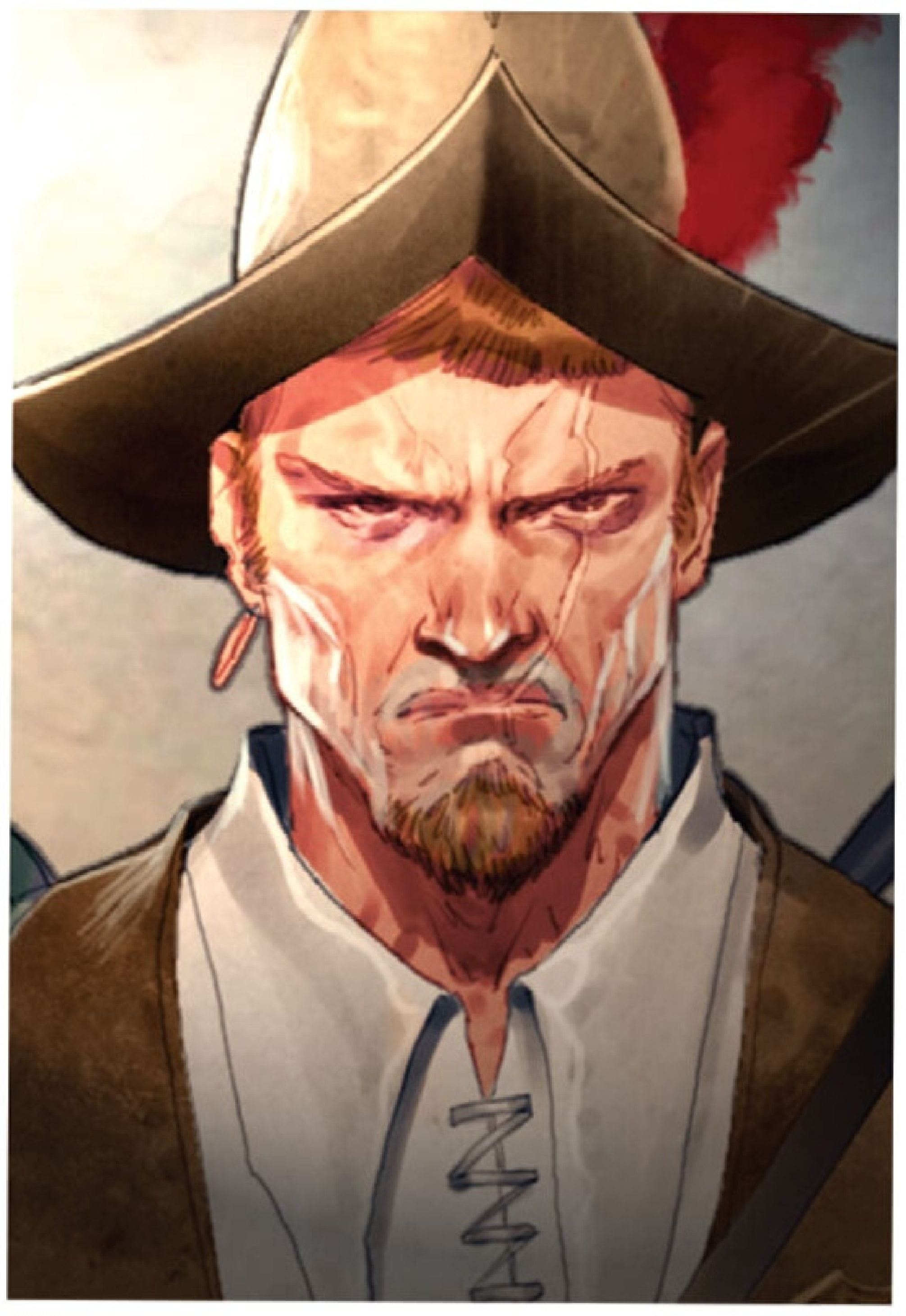
WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT YOU?
I DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY SAY.
COME NOW...
...THAT YOU'VE HAD RELATIONS WITH THREE DEMONS WHO WERE ENGAGED IN DIGGING UP CHILDREN'S CORPSES AND SUCKING THEIR BLOOD. MAYBE IF I GIVE ANOTHER TURN TO THIS WHEEL, IT WILL HELP YOU REMEMBER.
AHHHHH!
IT'S TRUE! IT'S ALL TRUE, SEBASTIAN DE LOUP!
I WAS AFRAID OF THIS. BUT I WAS ALSO AFRAID THAT THERE ARE MORE THINGS THAT YOU DO NOT WANT TO MENTION...
I HAVE TOLD YOU THINGS I DID NOT EVEN KNOW EXISTED, SEBASTIAN DE LOUP! KILL ME, FOR ALL THE GODS!
"ALL THE GODS"? BUT THERE IS ONLY ONE TRUE GOD, WOMAN!
I HAVE KILLED SIXTY PEOPLE. I DRANK THE BLOOD OF CHILDREN. I MET WITH OTHER WITCHES LIKE ME. I HAD A PET DEMON IN THE FORM OF A CAT AND I LEAPED AMONG THE VILLAGE ROOFTOPS IN CAT FORM, AS WELL. I FORNICATED WITH INNUMERABLE DEMONS, WHO VISITED ME IN THE FORMS OF DOGS, FLEAS, AND WORMS. I KILLED TWO HUNDRED FORTY PEOPLE.
WAS IT NOT SIXTY PEOPLE?
YES! AND I HAD SEVENTEEN CHILDREN WHOM I BEHEADED AND ATE. I PROVOKED STORMS. FIRE... WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT, SEBASTIAN DE LOUP?
ME? NOTHING, OF COURSE. IT IS OUR LORD WHO WANTS ALL YOUR SATANIC ACTS REDEEMED.
OFF WITH HER HEAD.
THANK YOU...
SLOWLY.

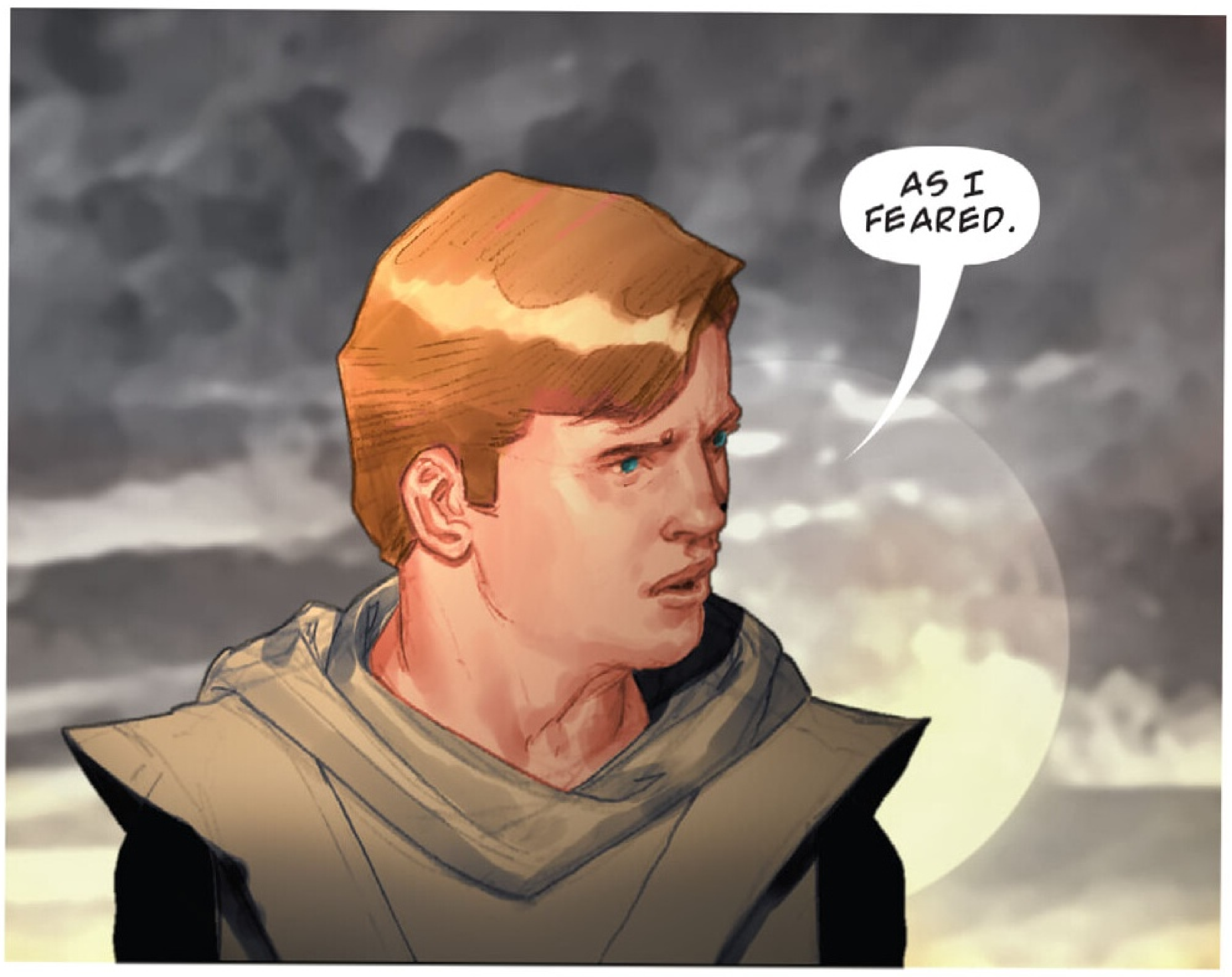

"IS THERE ANYTHING MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN A FIERY SUNSET AFTER A LONG WORKDAY?"


SOMETIMES I THINK I HAVE THE SOUL OF A POET TRAPPED IN AN INQUISITOR'S BODY.

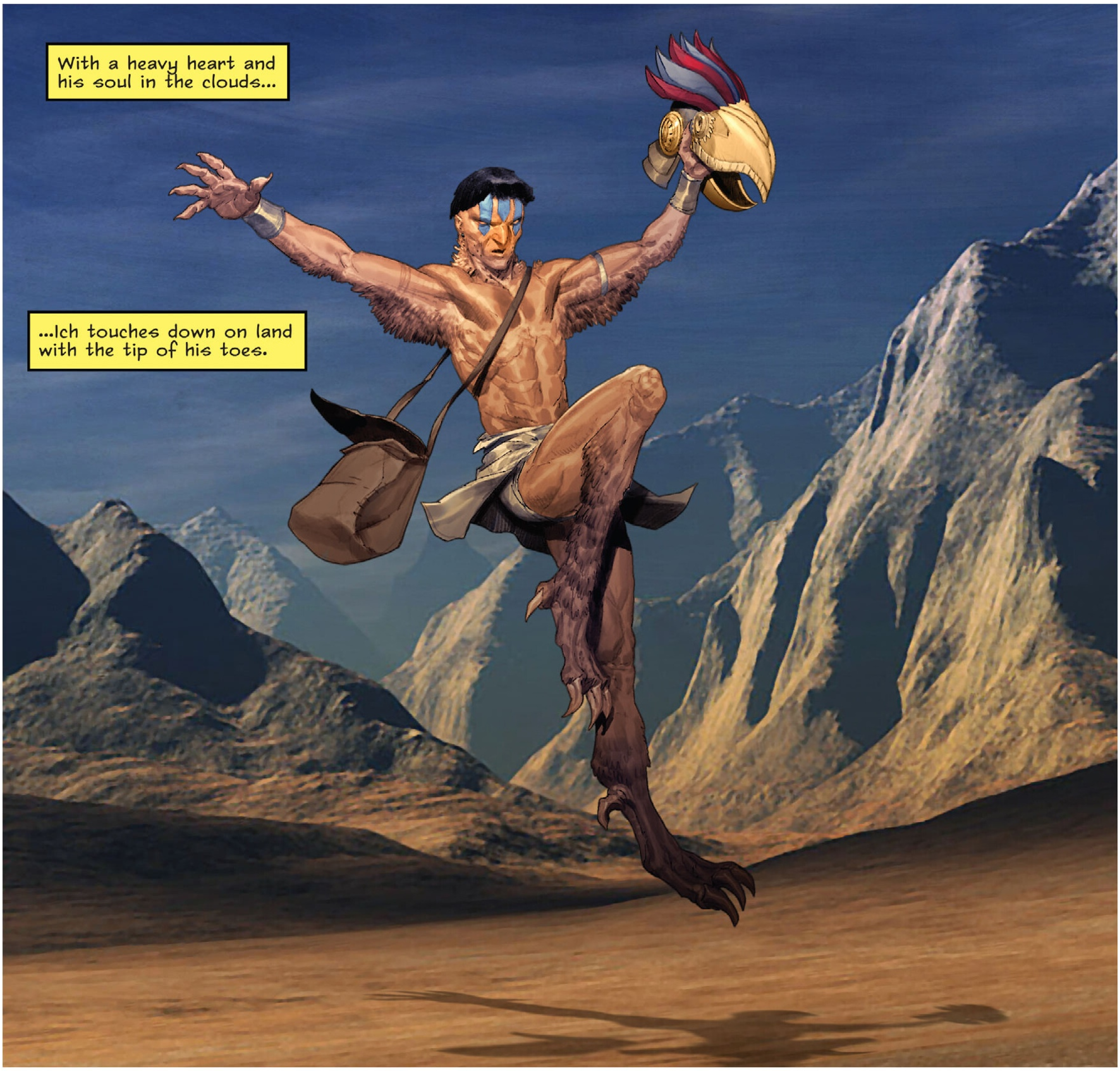

BUT THESE HANDS ARE BETTER AT BRANDISHING IRON THAN A PEN.
A SHAME.

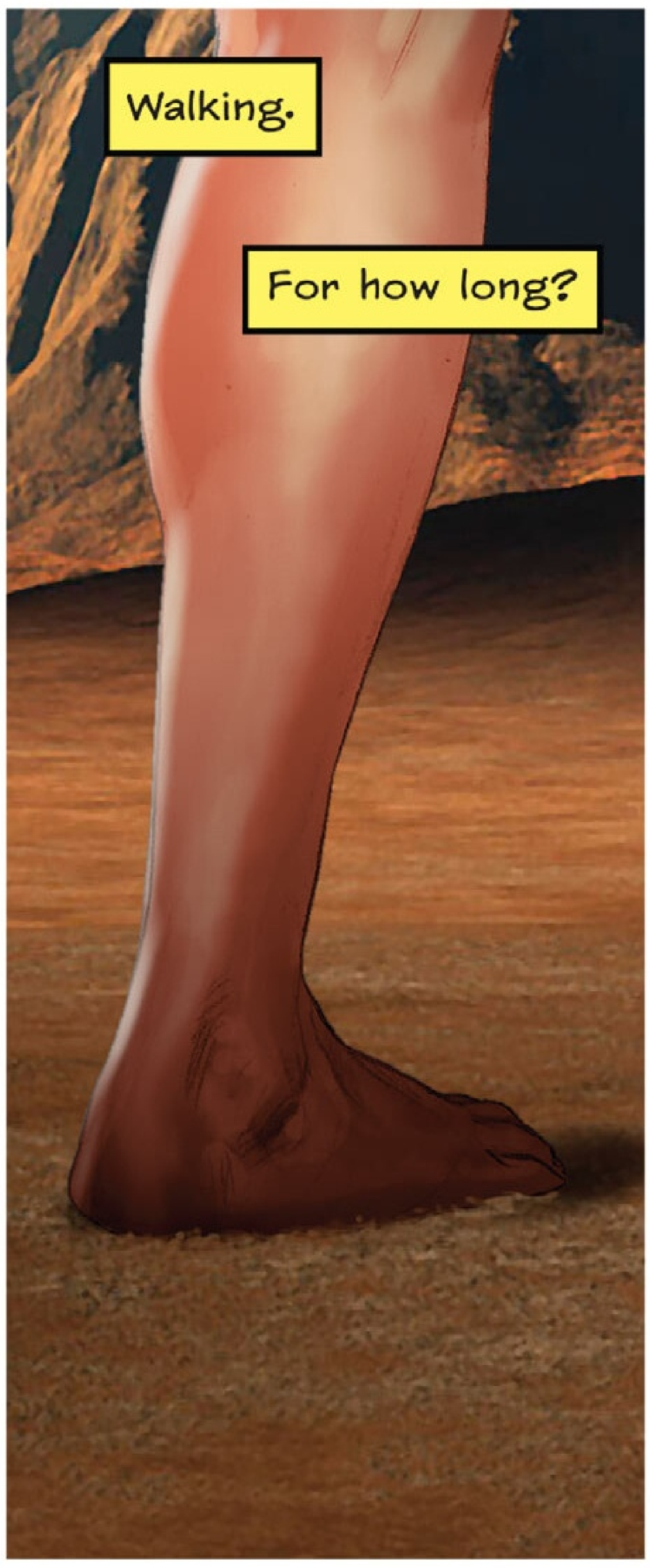

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE LIKED TO BE, WERE YOU NOT A FAILURE WITH NO WILL OF YOUR OWN?

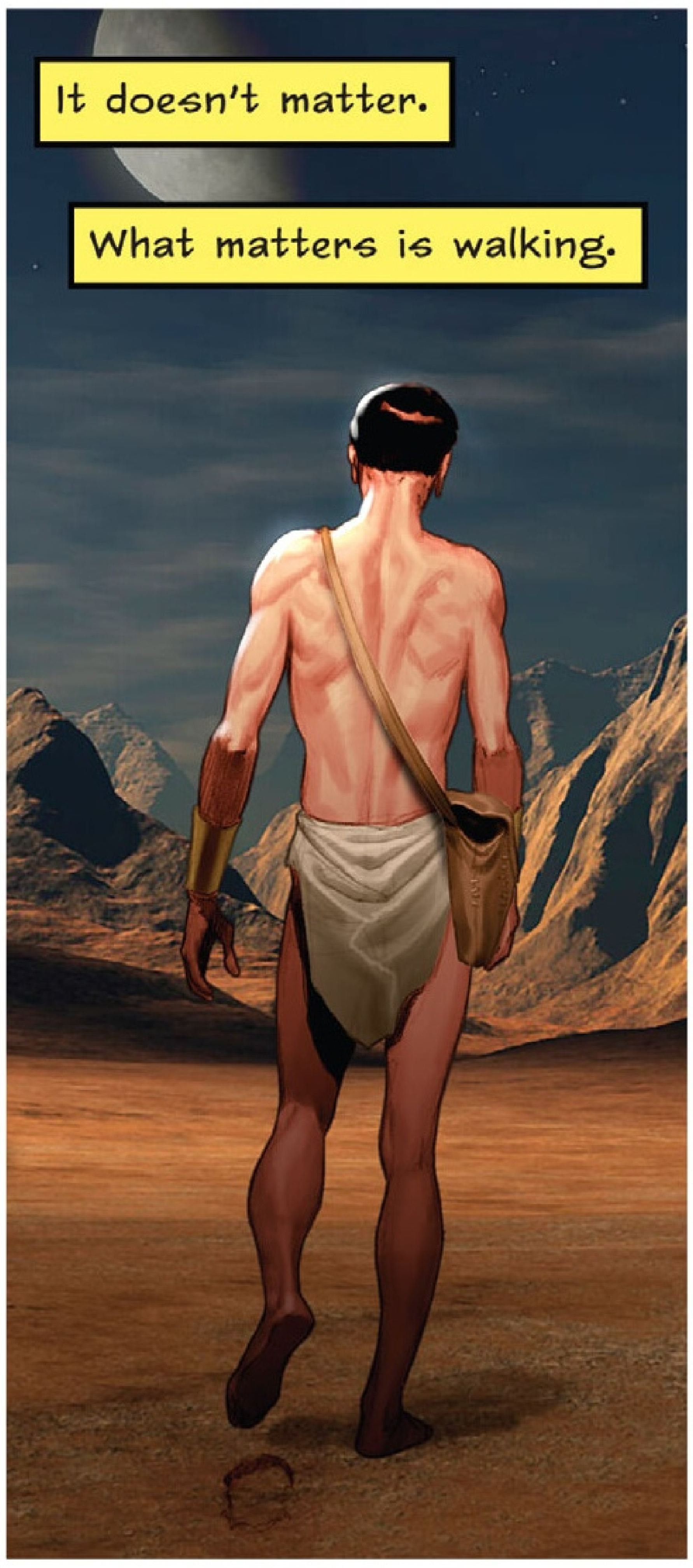


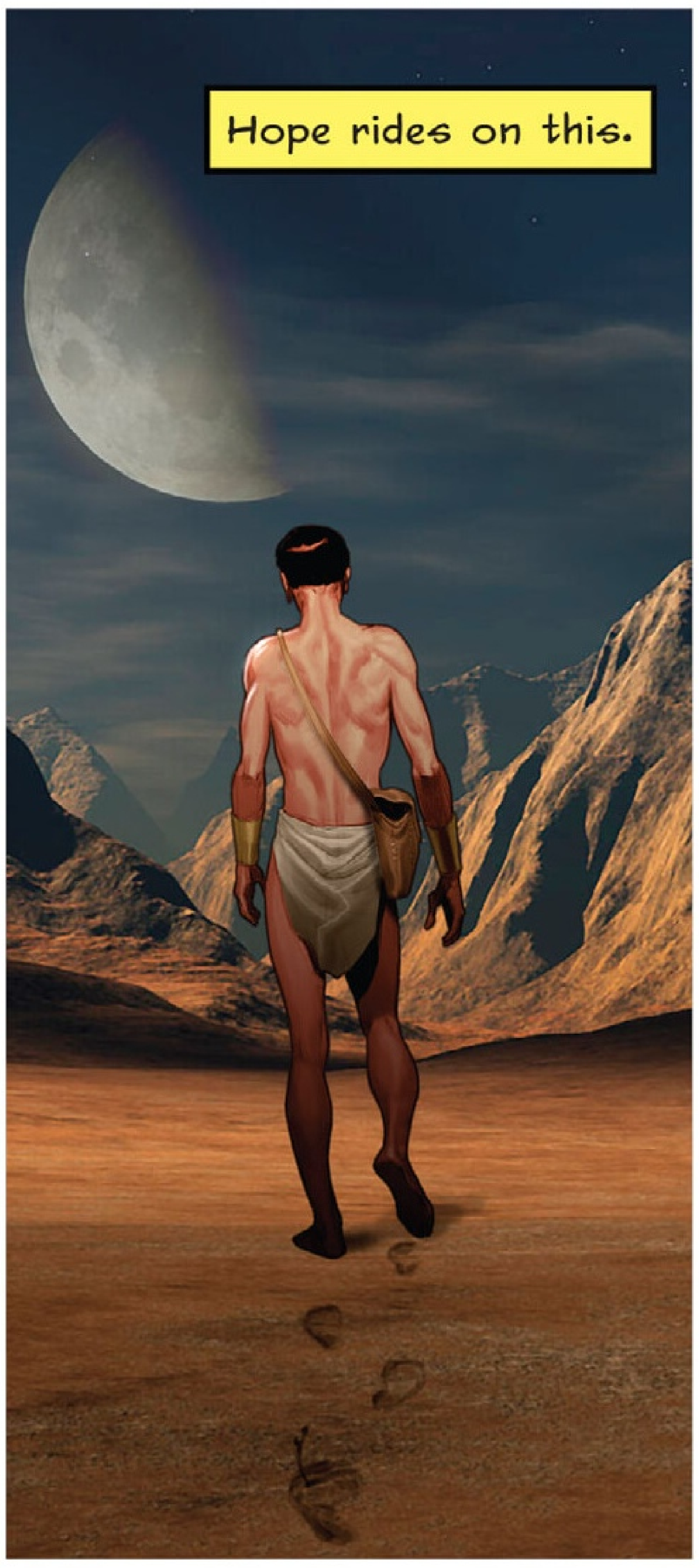

AS I FEARED.

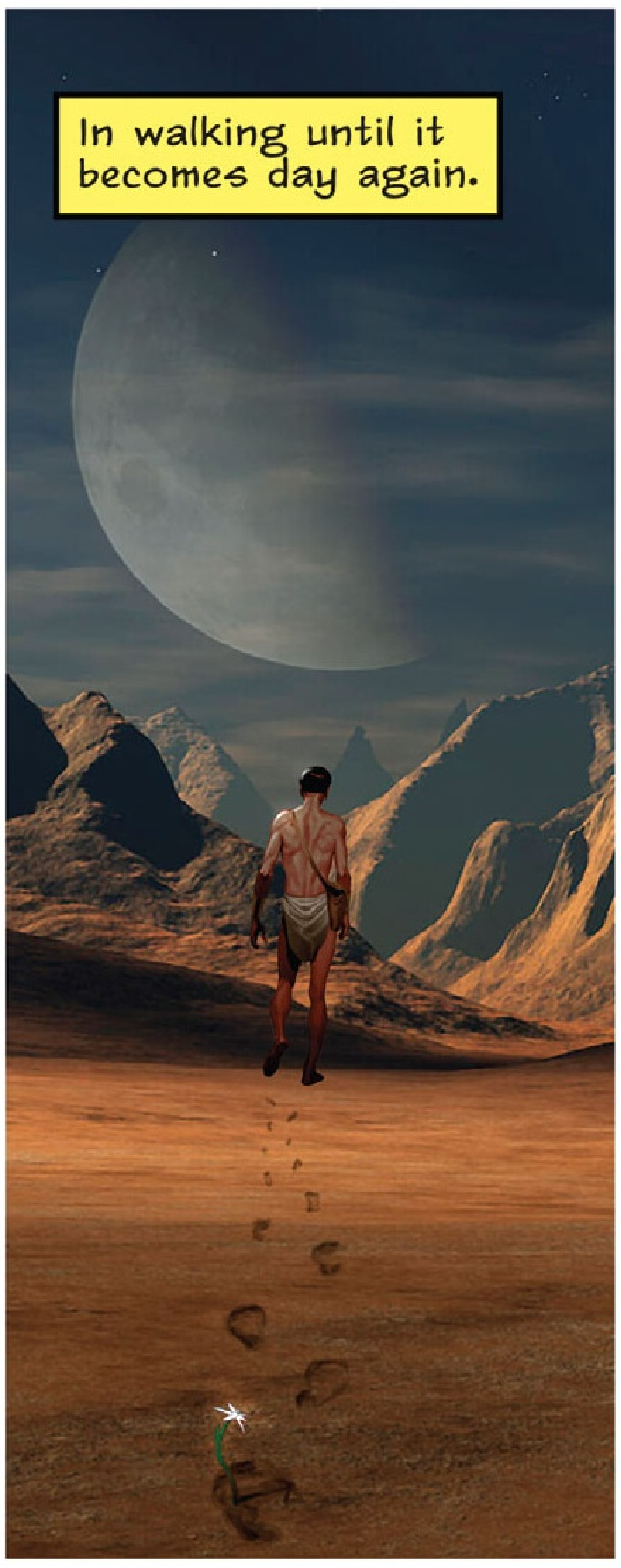
AH, LUCIEN! WHAT NEWS DO YOU BRING ME FROM WHEREVER IT IS THAT YOU SPEND MOST OF YOUR TIME?
YOUR SERVICES ARE REQUIRED ACROSS THE OCEAN.
AMERICA? I KNEW THIS DAY WOULD COME.
MAY I KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING OVER THERE?
THEY SAY THE DEVIL IS PUTTING UP A FIGHT AGAINST THE SPANISH TROOPS.
THE DEVIL INTERFERING WITH THE PLANS OF SATAN?
THAT'S A GOOD ONE.
WE WILL HAVE TO MAKE PREPARATIONS.
THEY SAY THE JOURNEY IS QUITE LONG.


With a heavy heart and his soul in the clouds...
...Ich touches down on land with the tip of his toes.

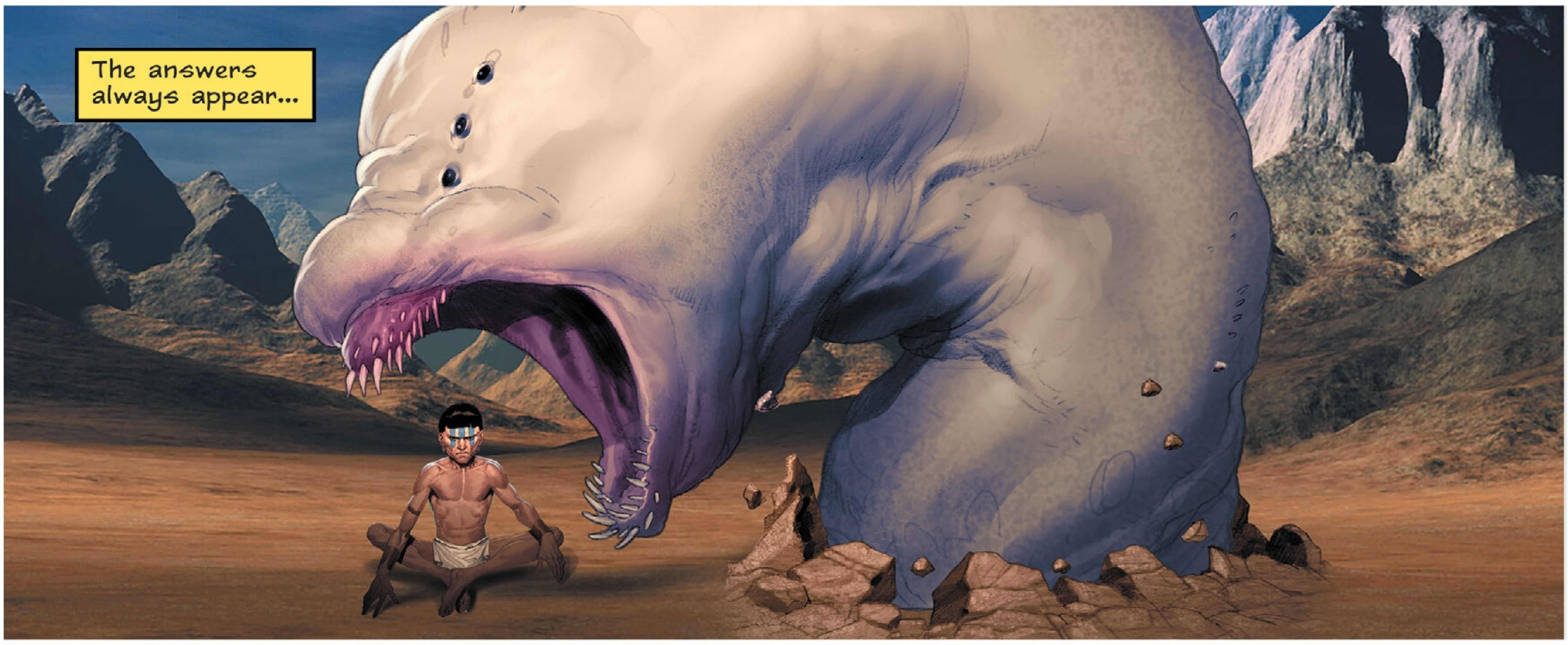

Walking.
For how long?

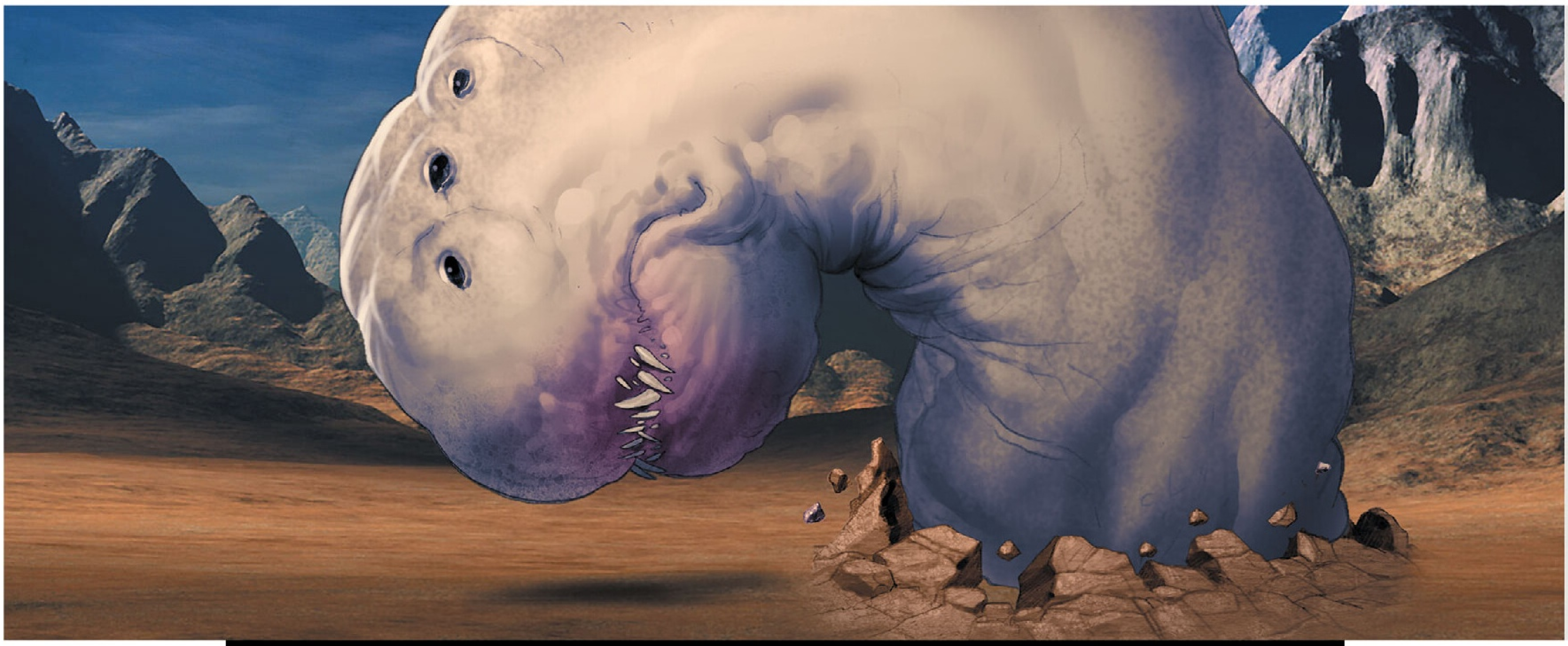

It doesn't matter.
What matters is walking.

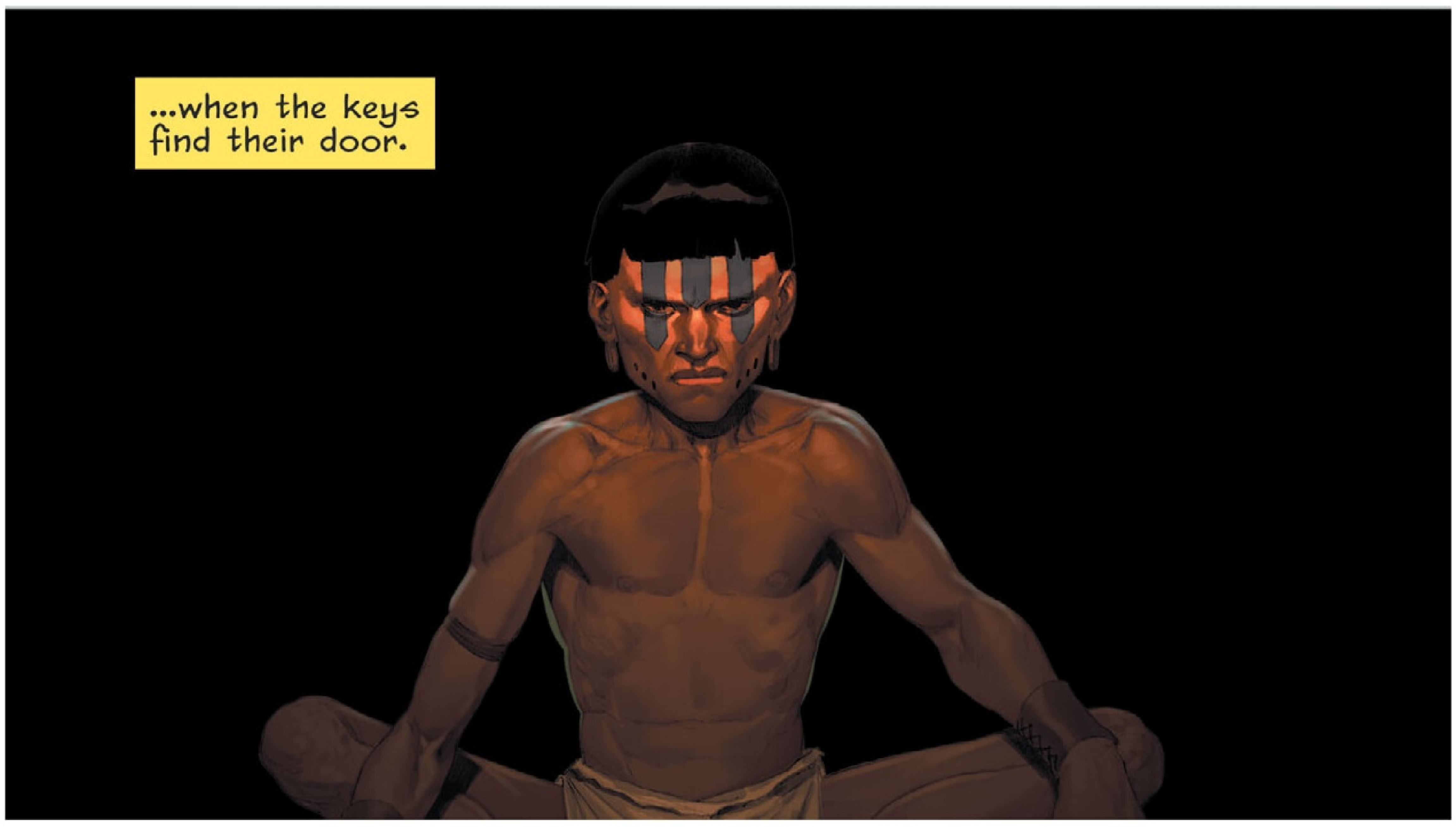

Hope rides on this.


In walking until it becomes day again.

Ich needs answers.
The doors require keys.

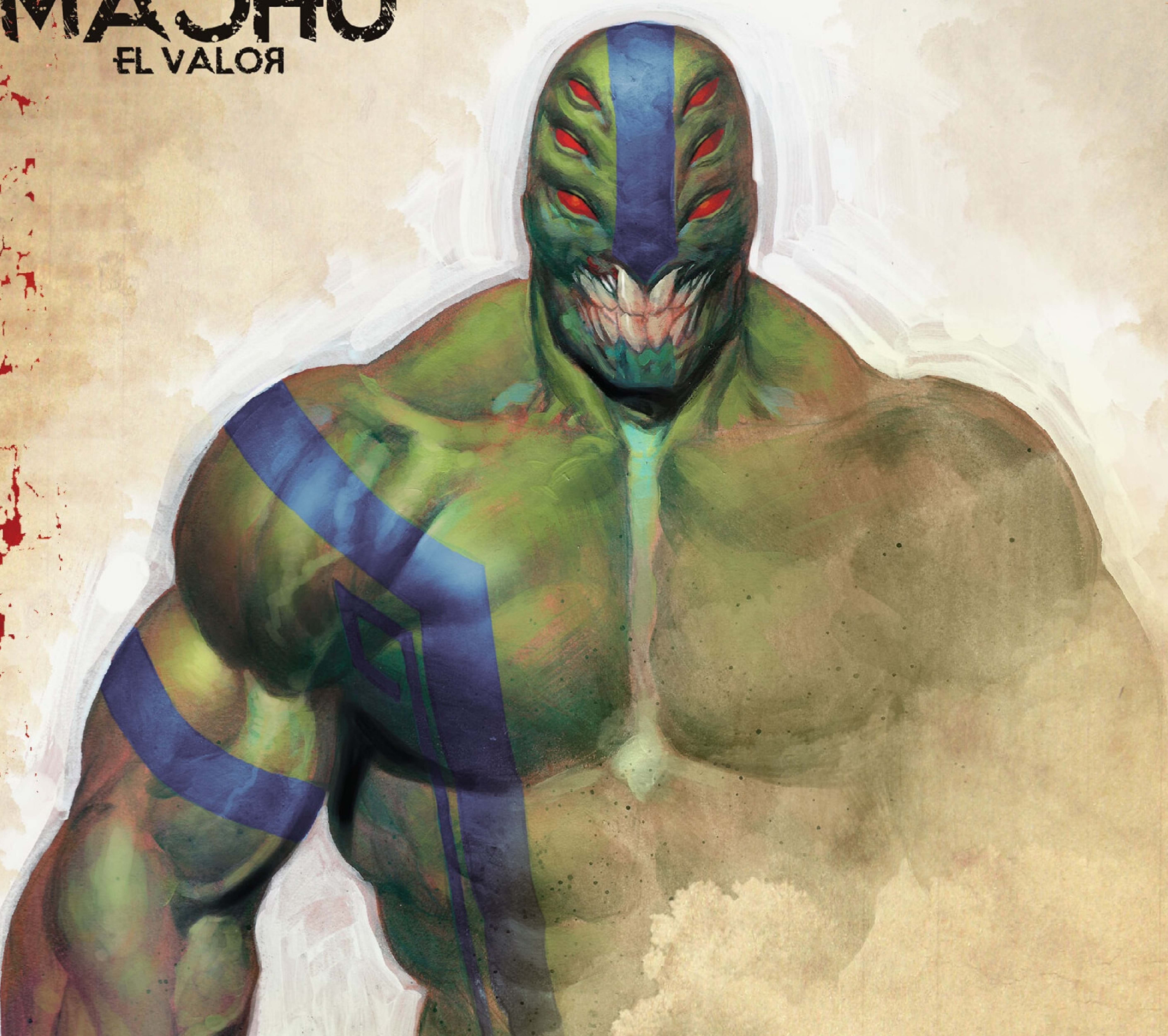

The answers always appear...




...when the keys find their door.

MACHU

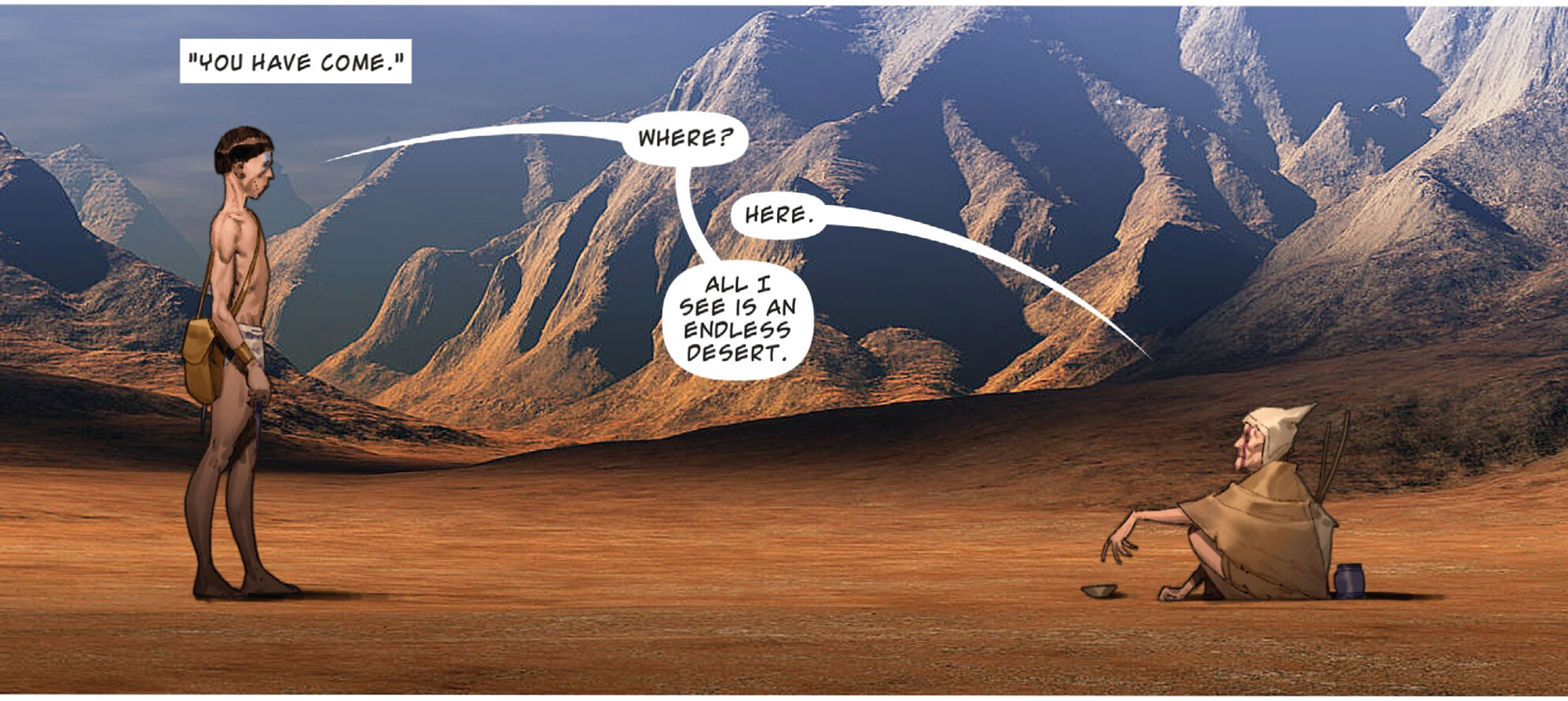
EL VALOR

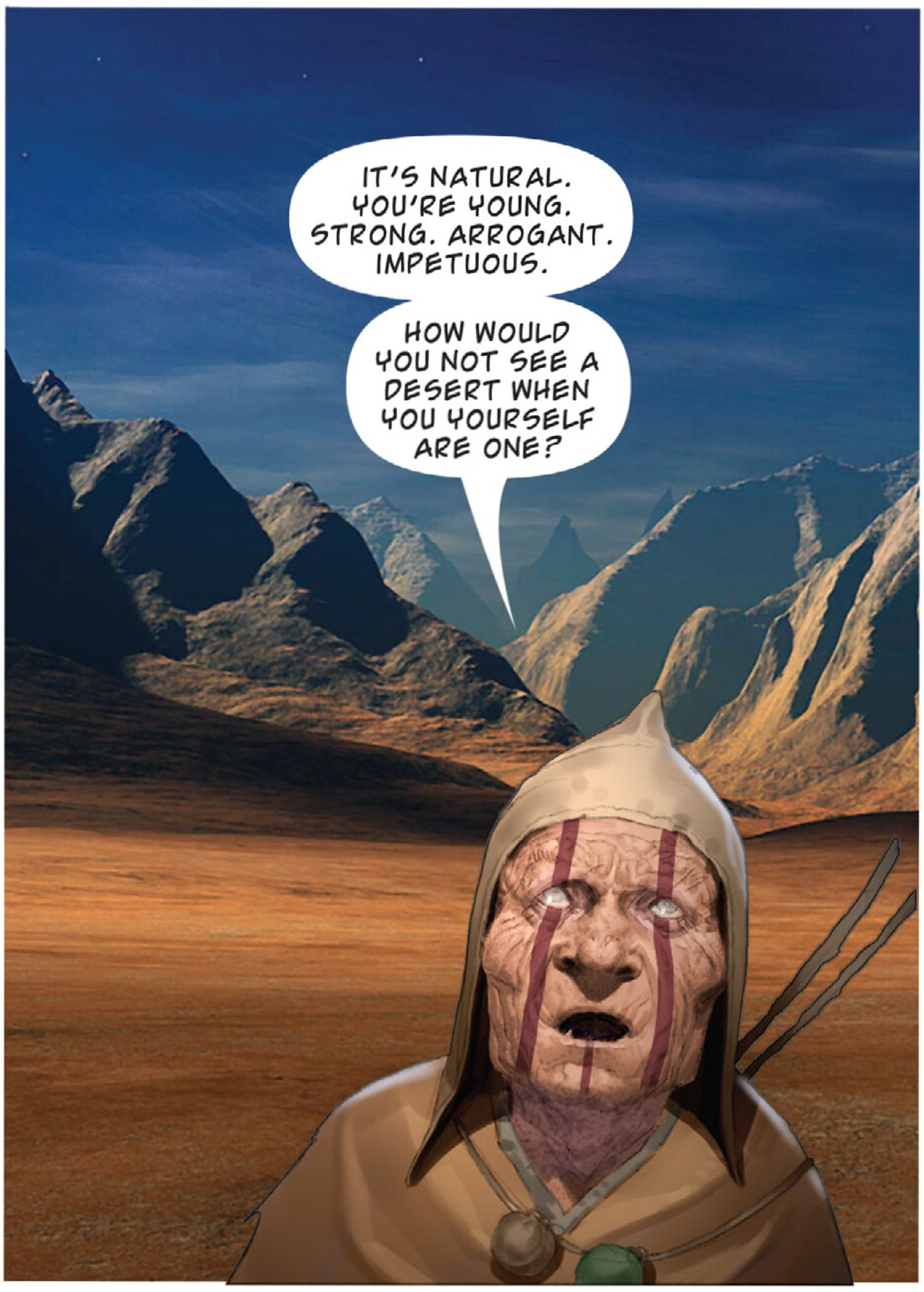


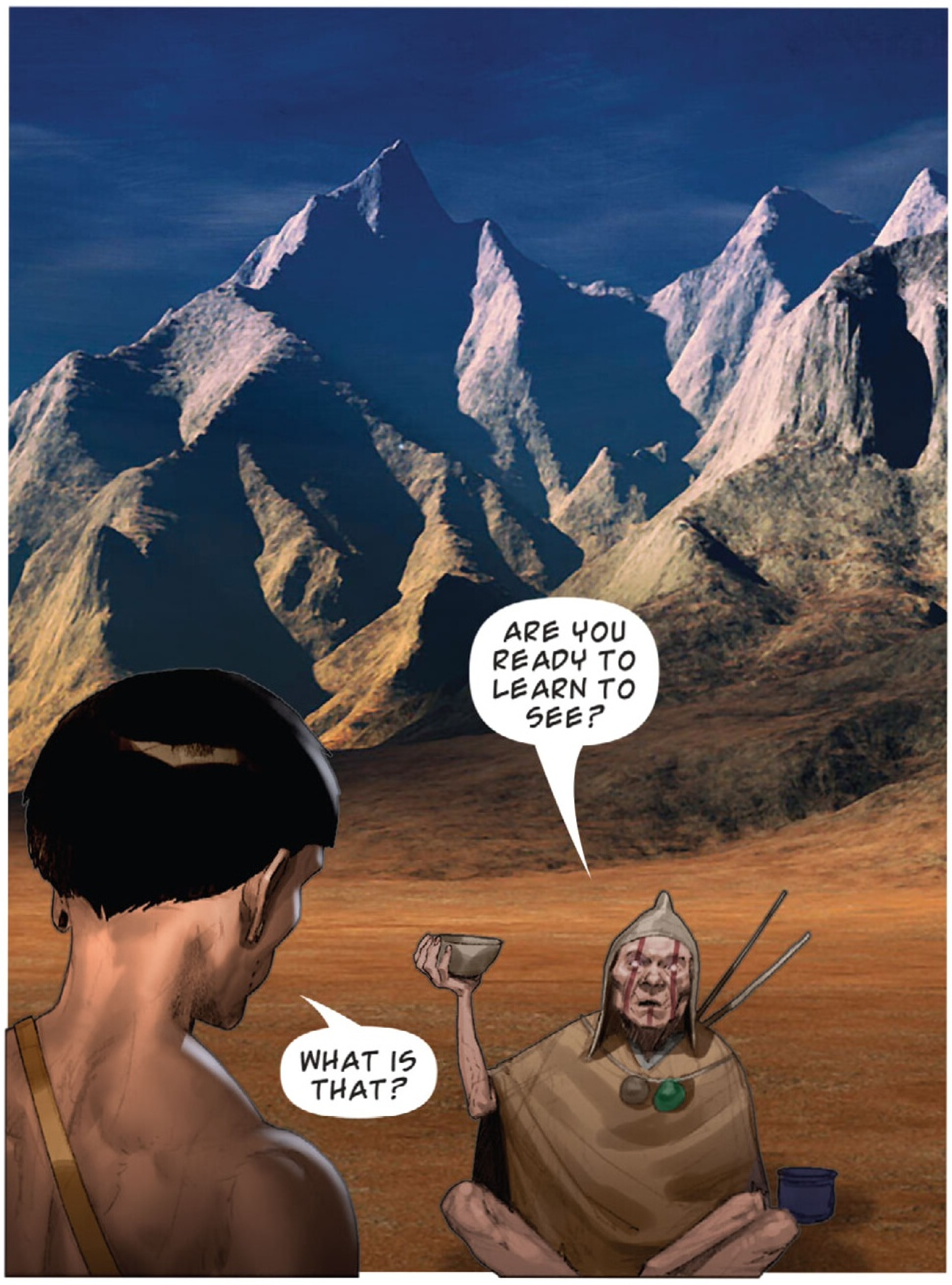
The White Worm helps us look inside.
When it devours us, we also devour wisdom. And we can see what we're made of.
Ich is made of thousands.
He is himself and each one that lives within. He is himself and he is all.
That is his power: to be one and all others.
That is also his curse.

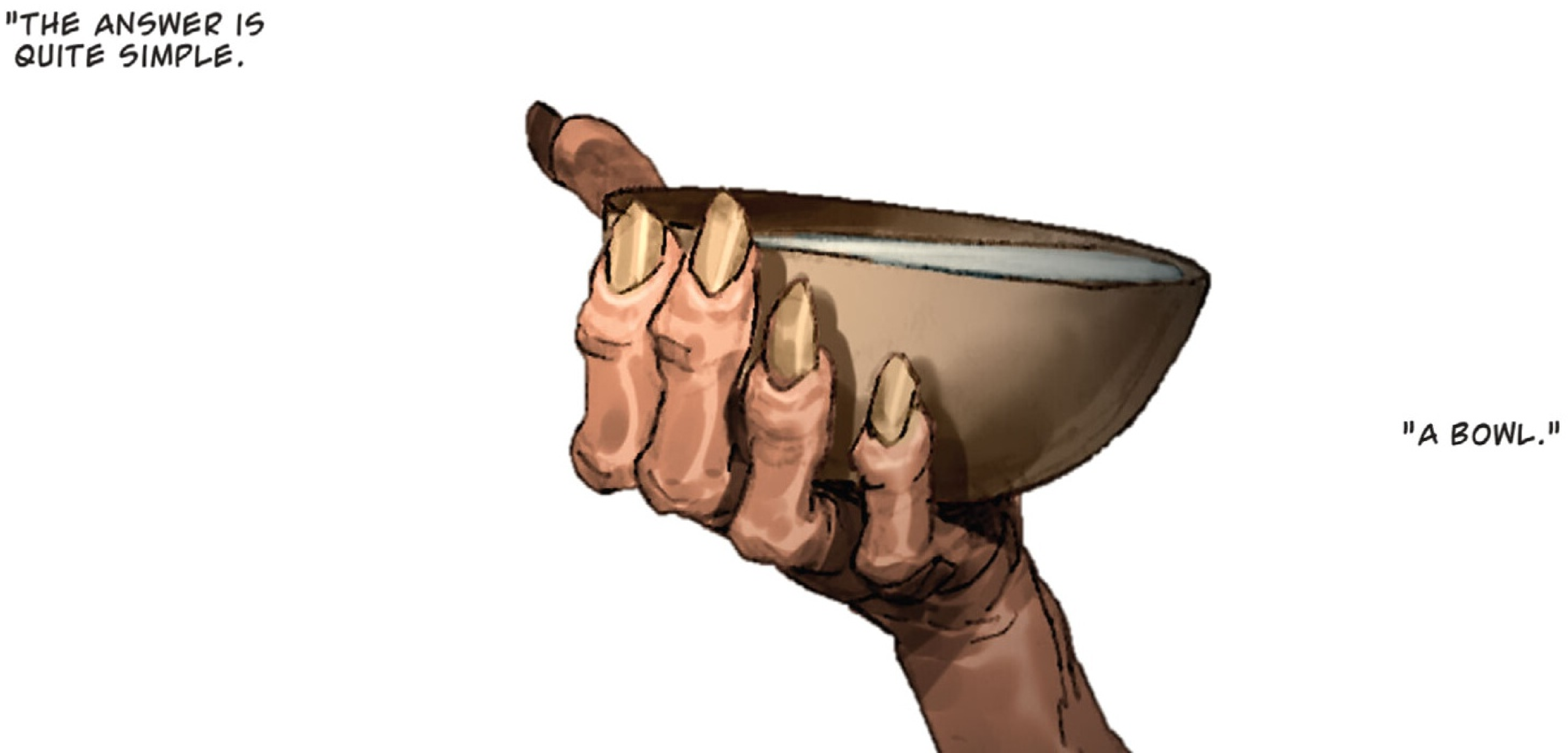
The stars say that it is in solitude where one can find the light within the belly of the worm.
Ich has been alone and understands.
Ich, now, must walk again.
YOU WERE INSIDE, I GATHER?
YES.
WHAT DID YOU SEE?
MASKS.
ICH MEANS "MASK," BUT IT ALSO MEANS "SOUL." YOU HAVE A THOUSAND SOULS IN THAT CONTAINER.
BUT ONLY ONE REFLECTION.
"WHAT DID YOU SEE IN YOUR REFLECTION?"
"FEAR."

"YOU KNOW, LUCIEN? I LOVE MY JOB. YOU CAN TELL WHERE YOU ARE TODAY... BUT NOT WHERE YOU'LL BE TOMORROW.
"YESTERDAY, FOR EXAMPLE. PLACIDLY TORTURING THAT POOR WITCH..."
...AND LOOK AT US TODAY. WITH THE SALTY SEA WIND TANGLING IN MY HAIR AND YOUR FEATHERS.
HAVE I MENTIONED BEFORE, LUCIEN, THAT IF I WERE NOT A TORTURER I WOULD HAVE SURELY BEEN A POET?
NOT THAT I'M COMPLAINING, OF COURSE. IT IS JUST THAT...
...WHAT ELSE DO YOU KNOW ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING BEYOND THE SEA?
I HAVE TOLD YOU EVERYTHING I KNOW, LOUP. A STRANGE FORCE IS INTERFERING WITH THE SPANIARDS' PLANS. THOUSANDS HAVE DIED. AND THOUSANDS MORE WILL DIE, IF YOU DO NOT DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.
YOU KNOW WHAT BOTHERS ME MOST ABOUT "OUR PEOPLE," LUCIEN?
NO, LOUP.
THAT EVERYTHING THEY CANNOT CATEGORIZE GETS PLACED IN THE SAME BAG AS THE DEVIL.
THE DEVIL THIS. THE DEVIL THAT. EVERYTHING THAT DOES NOT FIT IN THEIR LITTLE MINDS MUST BE THE WORK OF SATAN... COME ON!
SATAN DESERVES A LITTLE MORE THAN THAT.
SATAN IS...
HAVE YOU SEEN THIS SUNSET, LUCIEN?
"I'LL BE DAMNED IF IT IS NOT ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL I'VE SEEN IN MY LIFE."


"YOU HAVE COME."
WHERE?
HERE.
ALL I SEE IS AN ENDLESS DESERT.


IT'S NATURAL. YOU'RE YOUNG. STRONG. ARROGANT. IMPETUOUS.
HOW WOULD YOU NOT SEE A DESERT WHEN YOU YOURSELF ARE ONE?


ARE YOU READY TO LEARN TO SEE?
WHAT IS THAT?


"THE ANSWER IS QUITE SIMPLE.
"A BOWL."

"LOOK AT YOURSELF."
I ONLY SEE WATER.
"TAKE YOUR TIME."
I KNOW EVERYTHING.
I KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN. WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US. THE PAIN. THE BLOOD. OUR SCORCHED EARTH IN THEIR WAKE.
I SAW MY DEATH AND THAT OF EACH OF US.
WHAT WILL YOU DO NOW THAT YOU KNOW THERE IS NO HOPE?
WILL YOU ABANDON YOUR FATE OR FACE IT UNTIL FATE TAKES OVER YOU?

Ich knows it was all a dream.
And that there is no other path he can walk.

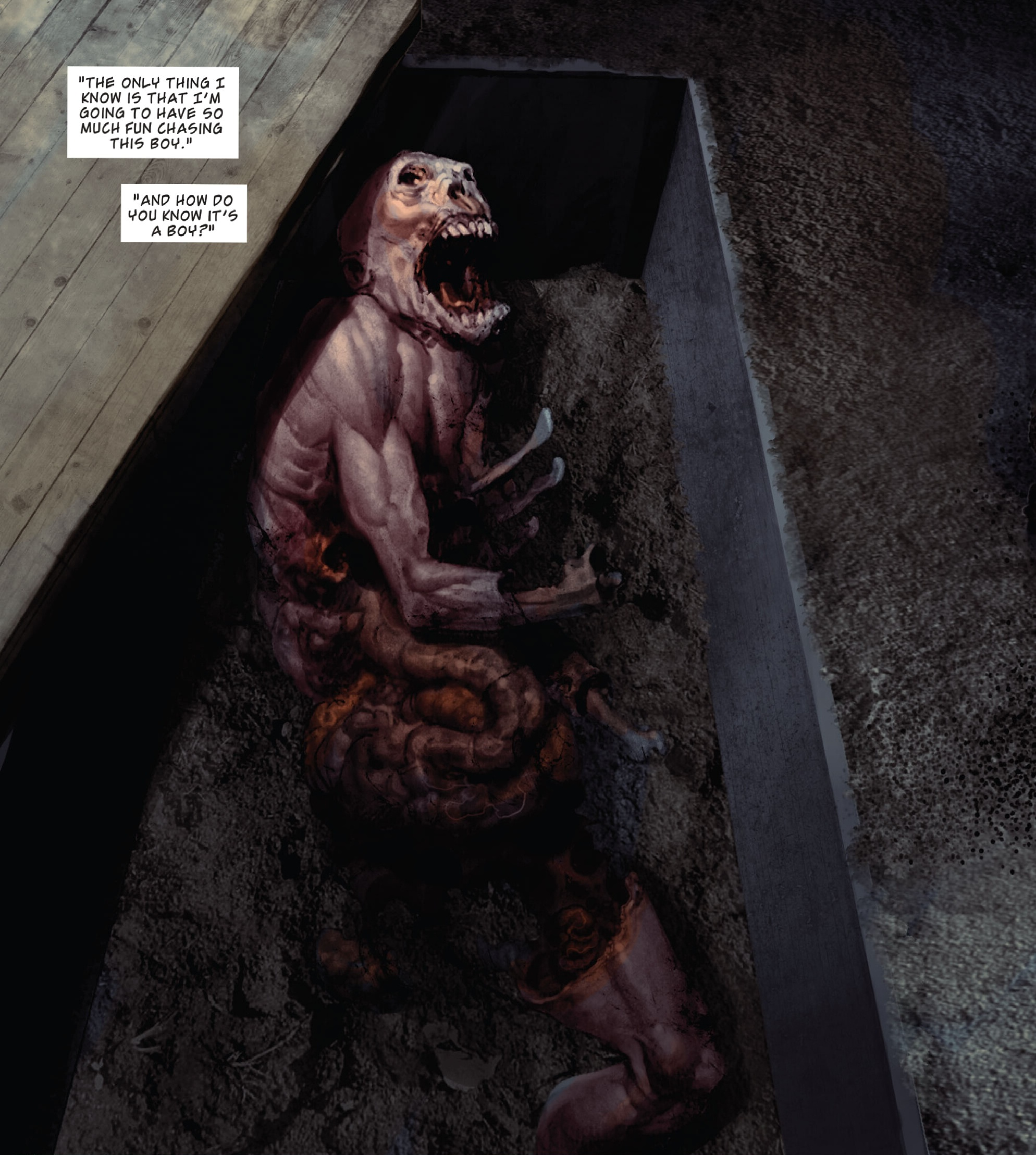
"AH, LUCIEN... IF YOU WERE HERE WITH ME...
"...YOU WOULD REALIZE HOW UNIMPRESSIVE AMERICA TRULY IS.
"ONE IMAGINED... I DON'T KNOW, *THINGS*... WHEN I THOUGHT OF AMERICA.
"INSTEAD, YOU ARRIVE AND... *CITIES!* COULD YOU HAVE IMAGINED THAT, DEAR LUCIEN?"

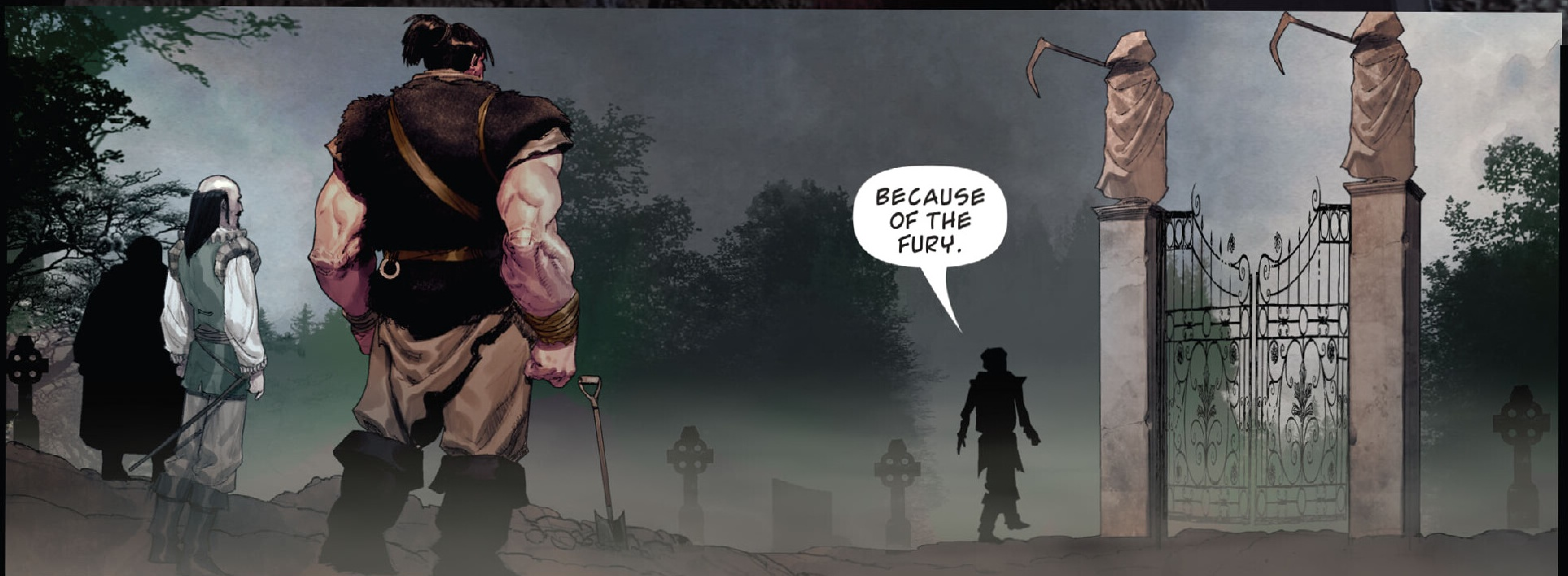
IS THAT HIM?
I BELIEVE SO.
HE DOES NOT HAVE THE BEARING OF A WARRIOR.
I'M IN AMERICA, I SUPPOSE.
THE SPANISH AMERICAS, TO BE EXACT. MY NAME IS ***LOPE DE ERRASQUIN***, LORD AND MASTER OF THESE LANDS. HERE, BESIDE ME: ***FRAY BUSTOS***, LORD AND MASTER OF THE FAITH OF THESE PEOPLE.
MY NAME IS ***SEBASTIAN DE LOUP***. LORD AND MASTER OF MYSELF.
I HOPE YOU DO NOT MIND I BROUGHT AN ASSISTANT TO AID ME IN MY WORK.
"I BELIEVE THAT HE HAS NO NAME.
"ALTHOUGH I USUALLY CALL HIM ***THE GERMAN***."

THE REPORTS THAT YOU SENT ME MENTION A SOMEWHAT... EXTRAVAGANT SITUATION.
DISTURBING, I WOULD SAY.
IF YOU COULD BE MORE EXPLICIT, FATHER...
APPARITIONS. BEASTS. INDECIPHERABLE CREATURES...
AND A BEAR!
OH, MY...
HAVE YOU ALREADY RULED OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A TROPICAL FEVER THAT COULD CAUSE HALLUCINATIONS AMONG THE TROOPS?
AT THE EXACT MOMENT WE SAW THE DEAD, WE DISCARDED THAT POSSIBILITY, SIR. THE DEAD... SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES.
I WOULD LIKE TO SEE THEM.
"YOU WOULD LIKE THIS?"
OF COURSE. I LIKE THE DEAD. TO SAY THAT I LOVE THEM, IT WOULD BE OVERKILL. DO YOU HAVE ANY CLUE AS TO WHAT MIGHT BE GOING ON HERE?
"WE ASSUME THAT THIS IS THE ADVERSARY."
"THIS REFERS TO SATAN, I SUPPOSE."
"WE TRY NOT TO SAY HIS NAME, SIR."
"SO YOU RENAME HIM... INTERESTING CHOICE."

"YOU MUST LISTEN TO ME, PLEASE."
YOU HAVE TO LEAVE THE VILLAGE RIGHT NOW AND TAKE REFUGE IN THE JUNGLE.
WHAT RUNS US OFF, ICH? THE SPANIARDS HAVE BEEN FRIENDLY TO US. WE JUST GIVE THEM THE GOLDEN STONES AND THEY ARE SO HAPPY, THAT...
IT WILL NOT BE JUST THEM. I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE AND... A DEMON IS COMING. A DEMON THAT WILL DESTROY EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH.
IF YOU'VE SEEN THE FUTURE, THEN WE CANNOT HELP IT, CORRECT?
"BUT WE CAN UNITE ALL THE TRIBES IN COUNCIL AND..."
I KNOW YOU MEAN WELL, ICH. BUT THE TRIBES HAVE BEEN AT ODDS SINCE BEFORE THE SPANIARDS ARRIVED. I'M SORRY, BUT...
WE WILL NOT HAND OVER THESE LANDS WITHOUT RESISTANCE.
AND ABANDON WHAT IS OURS?
EVERYTHING THAT WAS SOUGHT HAS BEEN FOUND, ICH. MAYBE IT'S TIME TO SIT AND WATCH THE FRUIT OF OUR LAND DRY UP.
IF IT IS TRULY OURS, IT WILL RETURN.

"I ALWAYS LIKED THE GROUND OF CEMETERIES.
"IT'S AGREEABLE.
"ALLOWS ITSELF TO BE TORN WITHOUT RESISTANCE."
IF EVERYTHING WE FACED WAS AS DOCILE AS THE GROUND OF CEMETERIES... AH! HOW BEAUTIFUL OUR LIVES WOULD BE.
WELL! AND YOU SAY THAT A SINGLE PERSON DID THIS?
WE NEVER MENTIONED THE WORD "PERSON."
NOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE DANGER OF THESE EVENTS, LOUP?


"THE ONLY THING I KNOW IS THAT I'M GOING TO HAVE SO MUCH FUN CHASING THIS BOY."
"AND HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S A BOY?"


BECAUSE OF THE FURY.

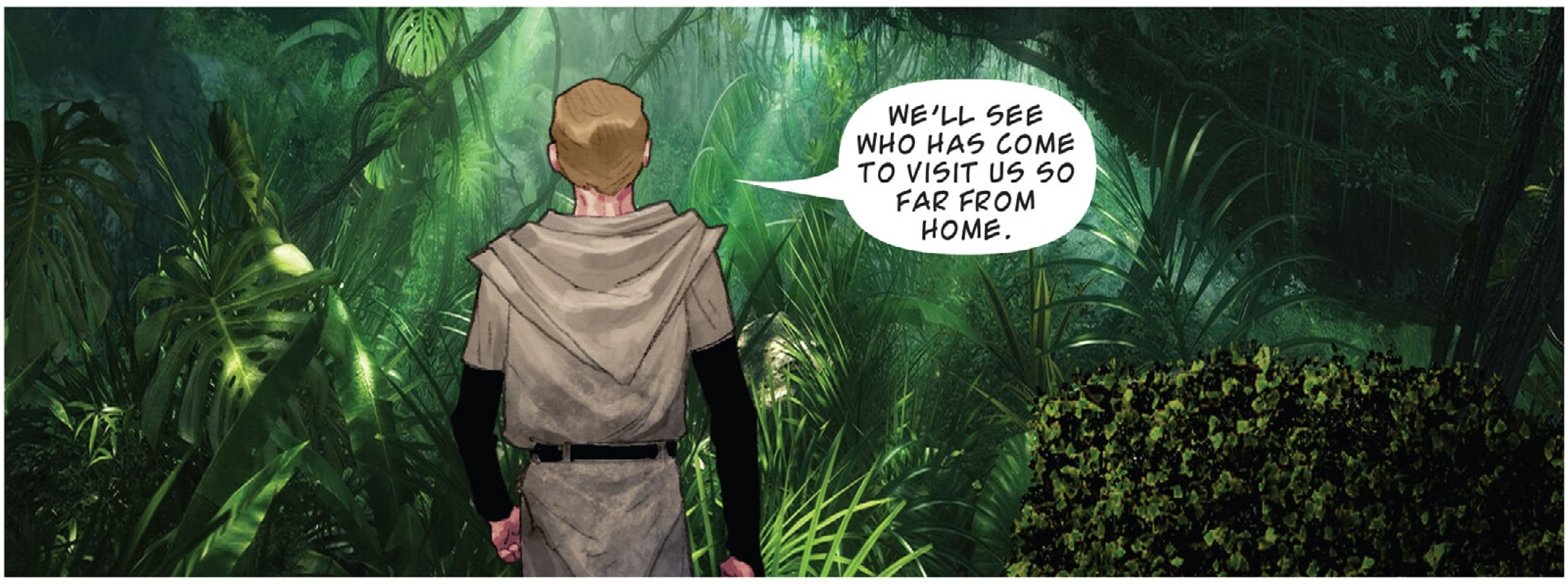
ICH?
PACHA MAMA SAID I WOULD FIND YOU HERE.
"SHE ALSO TOLD ME THAT YOUR SOUL WAS HURTING. IS THAT RIGHT?"
IT IS, YARETZI. IT HURTS AS IF A RED-HOT IRON WAS STABBING IT. IT HURTS LIKE NO NIGHTMARE I'VE DREAMED HAS EVER HURT.
HOW CAN ONE CURE THE PAIN OF THE SOUL? WHAT GRASS ARE YOU GOING TO FEED ME TO STOP THE BLEEDING?
NO OINTMENTS, ICH. NOR POTIONS. NOR SPECIAL HERBS.
BUT COME WITH ME.
IF YOU WANT, I CAN SING.
AND I HAVE A TOUCH THAT HAS YOUR NAME ON MY HAND.
"WILL YOU?"

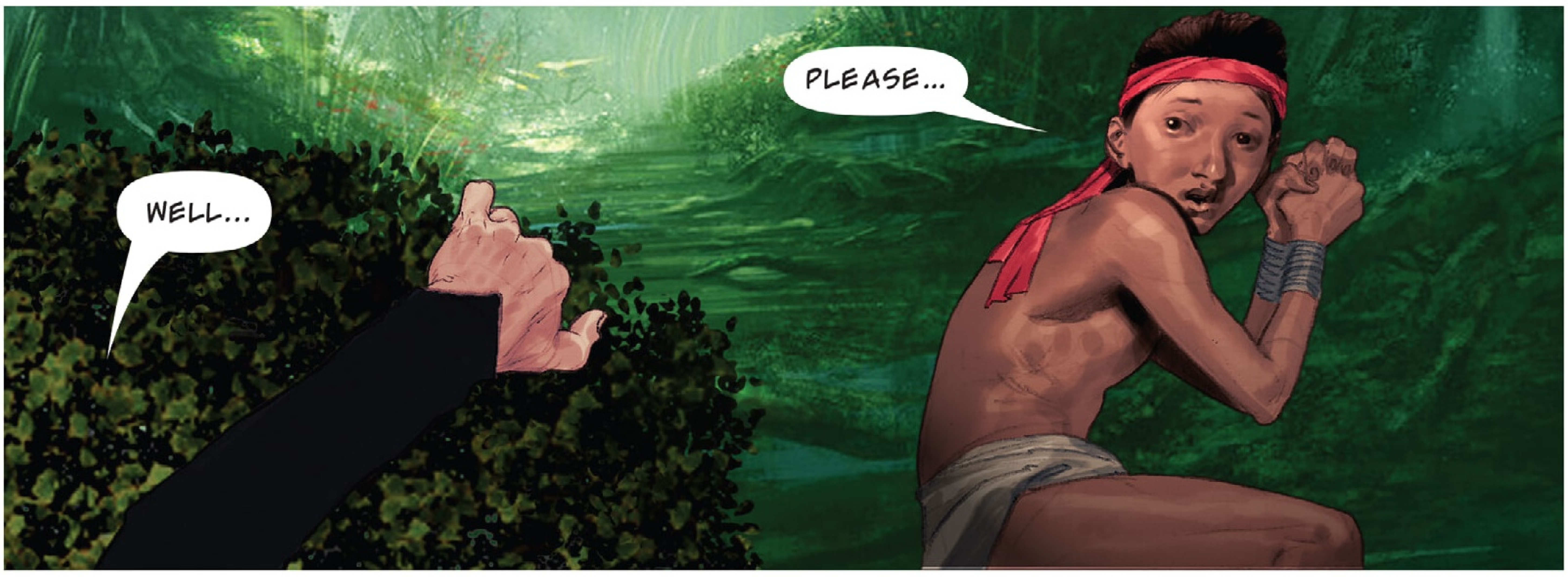
WILL YOU TELL ME, AT LEAST, THE DETAILS OF YOUR PLAN... LOUP?
IT'S NOT REALLY A PLAN, ERRASQUIN. IT'S A LETTER.
AND YOU NEED MY BEST MEN TO WRITE A LETTER?
I DO NOT KNOW. DO THEY HAVE GOOD HANDWRITING?
"I DEMAND AN EXPLANATION!"
IT'S NOT THAT COMPLICATED. WE WILL GO AND DEVASTATE A TRIBE OF SAVAGES... ANY TRIBE WILL DO, WE DO NOT CARE TOO MUCH ABOUT THAT PART... AND WE WAIT FOR THE ONE WE SEEK TO ARRIVE.
THEN... WE IMPROVISE.
WE IMPROVISE?
BUT THE LORD'S WAYS ARE...
INSCRUTABLE? NONSENSE. ALL WE DO—BADLY, MOST OF THE TIME—IS IMPROVISE.
NOW, WITH YOUR PERMISSION...

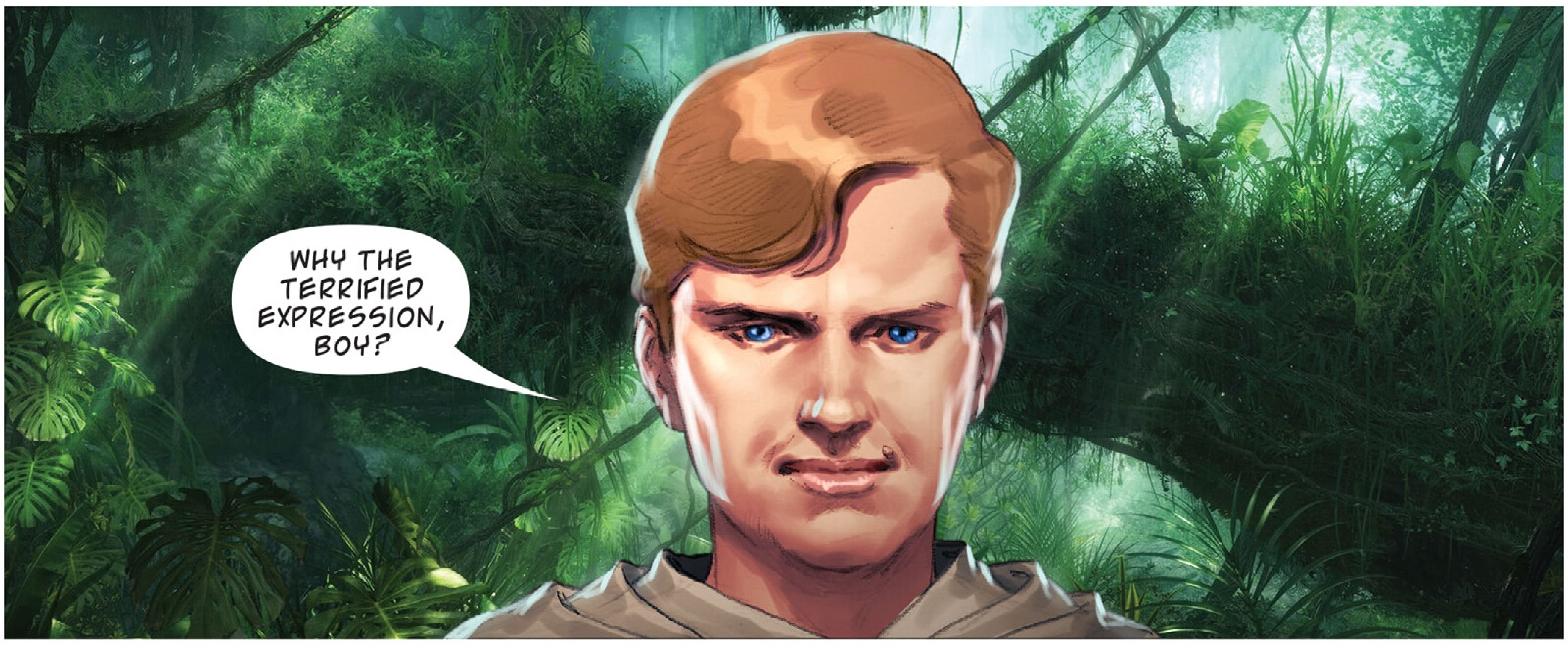
Yaretzi's caresses failed to put out the fire.
But at the very least, its flame no longer burned him. And that's enough.
There's a place, on top of the highest mountains, where Ich sought solace to think.
Where he hears the sound of the wind.
And he finds himself, by losing himself.
A place to get away from everyone. To be near no one.
There is a place at the top of the world...
...where silence whispers and Ich listens.

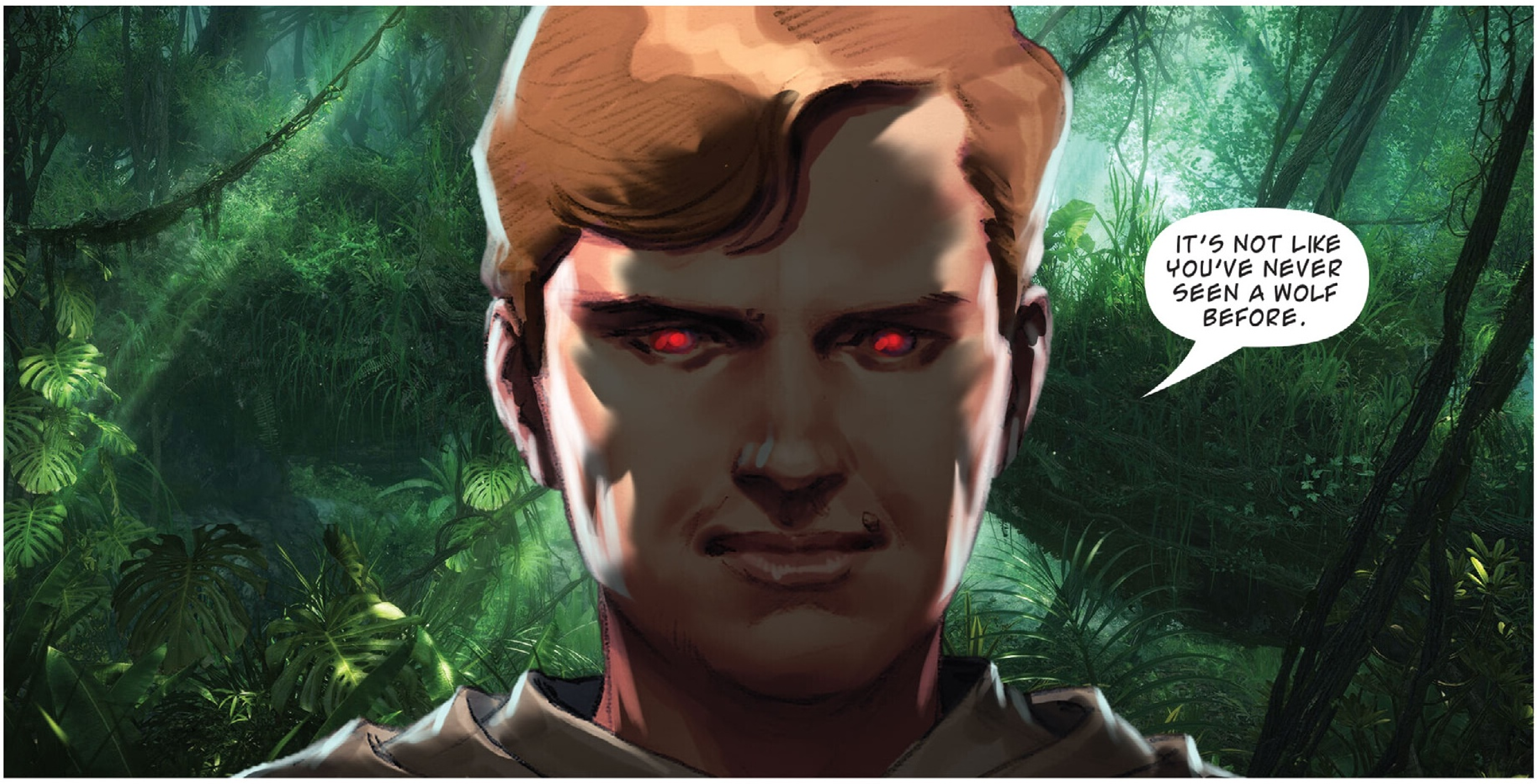
"AH, GERMAN!
"AMERICA IS MUCH MORE DISAPPOINTING NOW THAT WE'VE MOVED AWAY FROM THE CITIES. WHAT AN ABERRATION, THESE JUNGLES!"
AND HAVE YOU SEEN ANYTHING MORE RIDICULOUS THAN ONE OF OUR SOLDIERS WALKING THROUGH THE JUNGLE?
LISTEN TO THEM. IF WE WERE BEING WATCHED, THEY WOULD KILL US IN TWO MINUTES. THERE IS NOT ONE PIECE OF THEIR TIN ARMOR THAT IS NOT MAKING A FUSS AT THIS TIME.
"AND THE SMELL?
"HAVE YOU EVER SMELLED SOMETHING THIS NASTY IN YOUR LIFE, GERMAN?"
I THINK THEY MIGHT EVEN SMELL US IN SPAIN, IF THE WIND IS FAVORABLE.
I HATE THEM.
I WOULD KILL THEM NOW IF THEIR DEATH WASN'T MORE USEFUL TO ME IN A FEW HOURS.

"AND I NEVER TIRE OF REPEATING THIS, GERMAN...
"...IF THERE WAS SOMEONE NEARBY...
"...THEY'RE PROBABLY WATCHING US AS WE SPEAK."
STOP! I JUST HEARD SOMETHING.
"USE YOUR SENSES, GOOD GERMAN.
"SNIFF IT OUT.
"VERY GOOD."


WE'LL SEE WHO HAS COME TO VISIT US SO FAR FROM HOME.


PLEASE...
WELL...

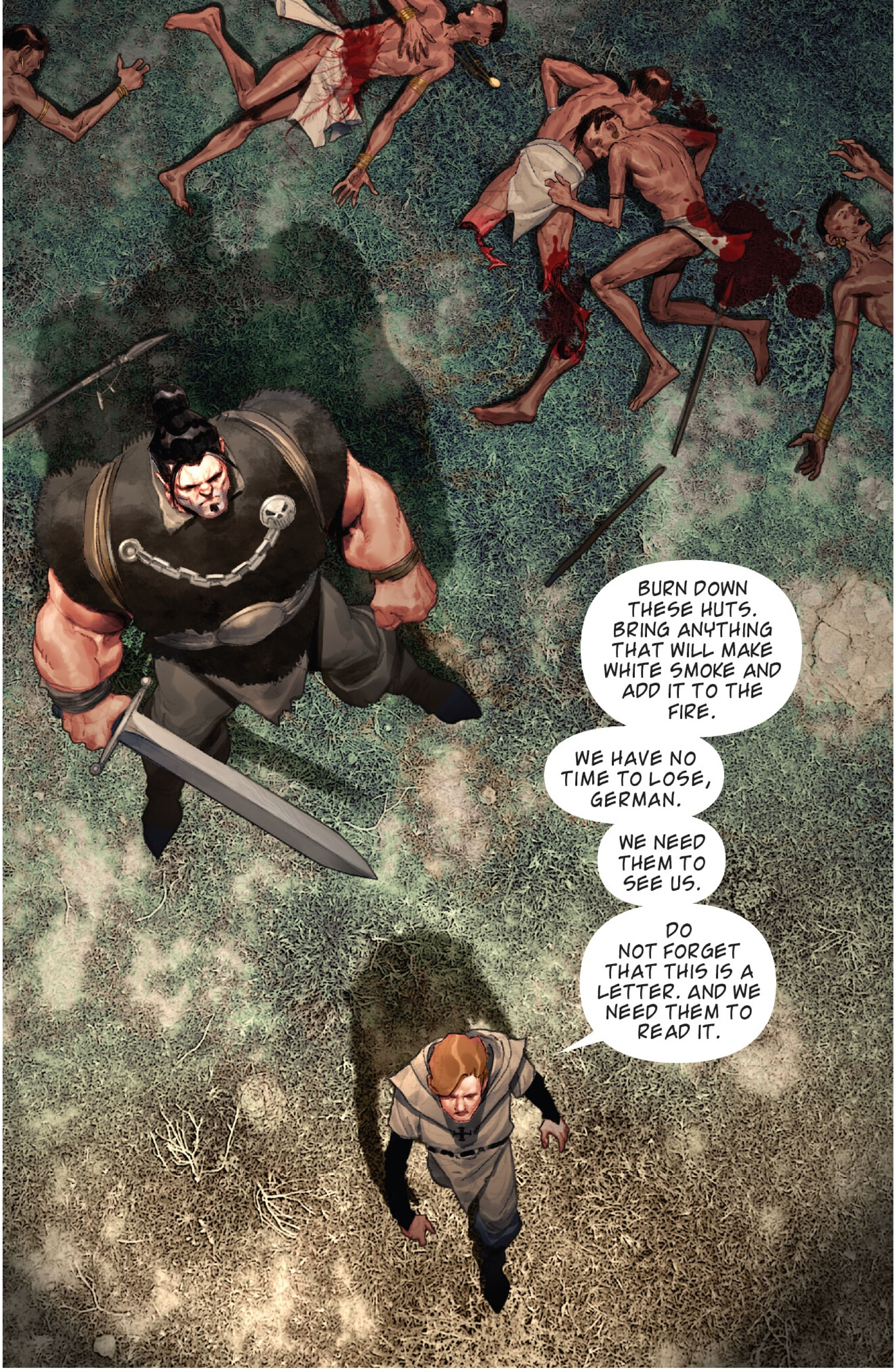

WHY THE TERRIFIED EXPRESSION, BOY?

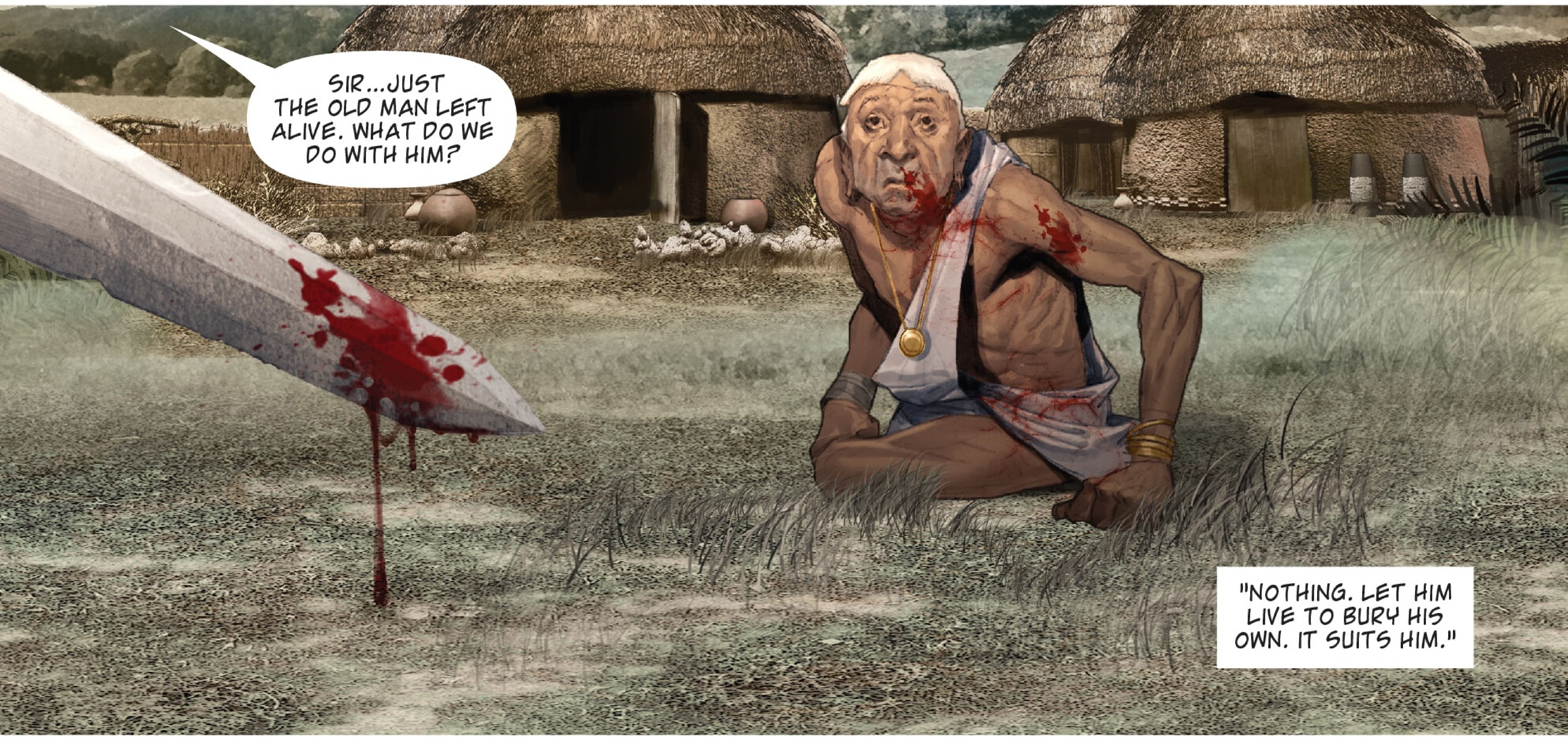

IT'S NOT LIKE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN A WOLF BEFORE.

WE COME IN PEACE, MY GOOD PEOPLE.
MY DEEPEST CONDOLENCES.
WE ARE AT PEACE.
MAKE YOURSELVES COMFORTABLE AND WELCOME TO OUR HUMBLE ABODE.
I HOPE YOU ARE SATISFIED WITH THE OFFERINGS THAT WE HAVE PREPARED FOR YOU, TRAVELERS OF THE SEA.
THANK YOU.
WE HAVE ALSO BROUGHT A GIFT.
"IT'S A TRIFLE. BUT, YOU KNOW: IT'S THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS."

"WELL...
"...THEY REALLY DIDN'T LIKE IT, RIGHT?
"ONE CAN HONESTLY SAY..."
"...WE ARE AMONG FRIENDS."

KUSKALLA
LA UNION


BURN DOWN THESE HUTS. BRING ANYTHING THAT WILL MAKE WHITE SMOKE AND ADD IT TO THE FIRE.
WE HAVE NO TIME TO LOSE, GERMAN.
WE NEED THEM TO SEE US.
DO NOT FORGET THAT THIS IS A LETTER. AND WE NEED THEM TO READ IT.


SIR...JUST THE OLD MAN LEFT ALIVE. WHAT DO WE DO WITH HIM?
"NOTHING. LET HIM LIVE TO BURY HIS OWN. IT SUITS HIM."

Thousands of kilometers away, one could see the snake of white smoke.
From above, tragedies are all equal. You need to approach to discover their nuance.
It is no longer pain that dwells in the soul of the warrior.
It is hatred.
And it is hate that dictates what Ich does next.

WITH THIS, I CAN FINALLY PAY FOR MY INDULGENCES. BUY MY WAY PAST ST. PETER.
AND WITH PLENTY LEFT OVER FOR A NIGHT ON THE TOWN!
WHAT THE HELL...?
HE HAS ARRIVED.
AND FROM WHAT I CAN SEE, THIS WILL BE MORE FUN THAN I IMAGINED.
"LOOK, GERMAN. IT'S NOT A MURDERER. IT'S... AN ARTIST! WATCH HIS MOVEMENTS. HIS SILENCE. HIS COLORS."

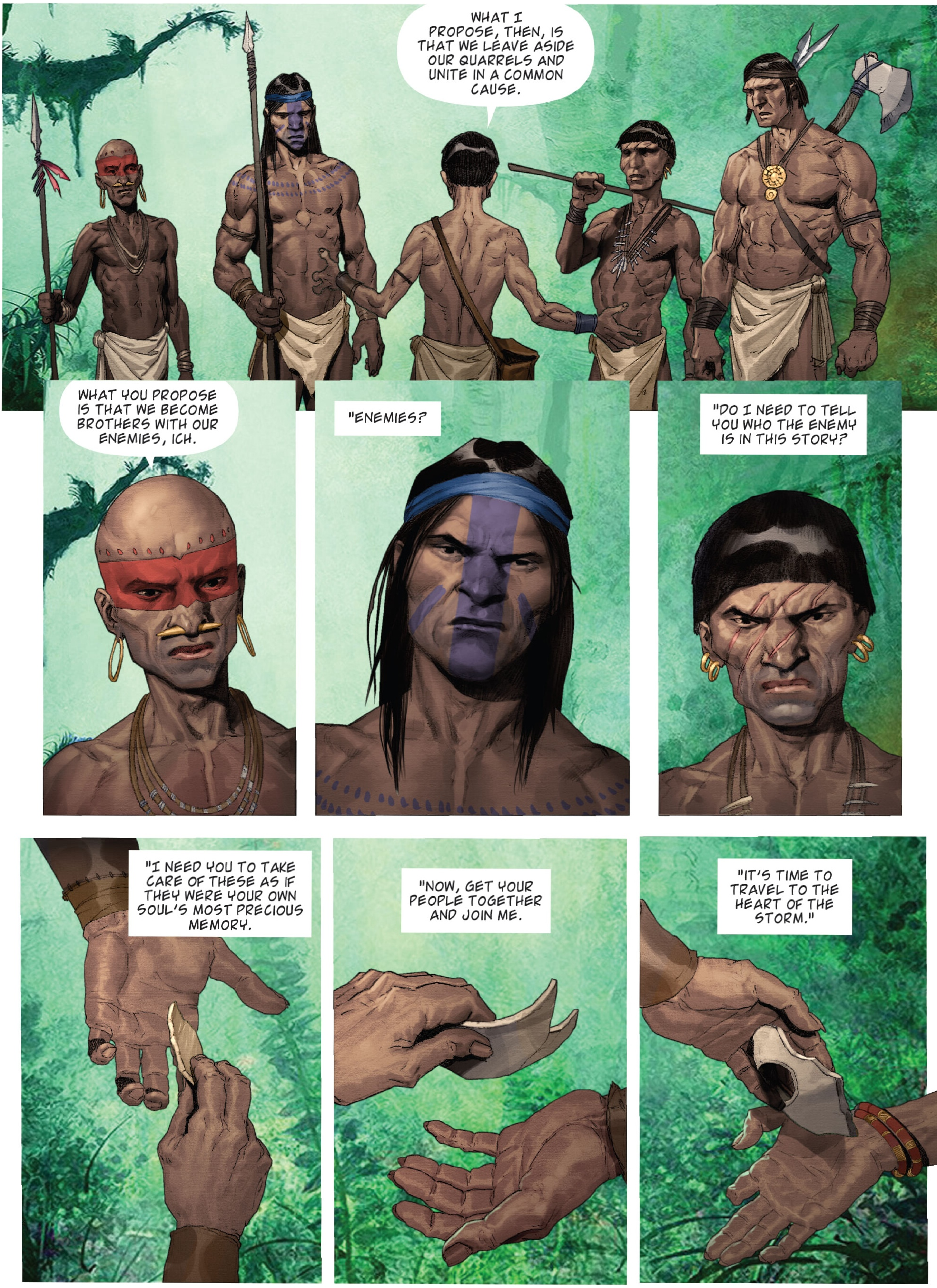
"TOO BAD WE'RE THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN ENJOY IT."
AIM FOR THE SOFT SPOTS! DON'T LET IT FRIGHTEN YOU!
CHACK

AHHH!
GGHH...
CLANG
DEAR GOD!

With the cries of the invaders silenced, the beast that has Ich within leaves in search of the shadows of the jungle.
But the shadows of the jungle do not wash away the blood or undo the slaughter.
The beast that has Ich within can only get away.
"Where do I go?" asks the voice in the cave of his soul.
He knows now that he can never silence the voice—or the shrieks of his victims.

Once the mask falls off the one it ruled, the bones reset into their container. They break off and melt. The skin is reborn.
The process hurts like nothing in the world, each time.
After killing, Ich returns to humanity.
But he no longer has tears that will help him bring out the pain within.
YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, DO YOU?
UNDERSTAND?
THAT YOU CAN NOT GO IT ALONE. YOU'RE IN A MAZE THAT ONLY ENDS WITH YOUR DEATH.
DO YOU NOT SEE, PERHAPS, THAT SPRING DOES NOT EXIST IN SOLITUDE?
A FLOWER IS NOTHING. A GROUP OF FLOWERS DO NOT MAKE SPRING. BUT ALL OF THE FLOWERS DO.

A DROP BARELY WETS. BUT A BOWL SATES YOUR THIRST.
AN OCEAN DROWNS. TURNS OVER SHIPS. BANISHES ISLANDS WITH A SINGLE BREATH.
YARETZI... I... I DO NOT UNDERSTAND.
A SINGLE FINGER TAPS. POINTS.
A HAND CARESSES.
A FIST HITS.
ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME...?
BE SPRING RATHER THAN THE FLOWER.
BE AN OCEAN RATHER THAN A DROP.
BE A HAND AND A FIST, INSTEAD OF A FINGER.
"BE ICH."


WHAT I PROPOSE, THEN, IS THAT WE LEAVE ASIDE OUR QUARRELS AND UNITE IN A COMMON CAUSE.
WHAT YOU PROPOSE IS THAT WE BECOME BROTHERS WITH OUR ENEMIES, ICH.
"ENEMIES?
"DO I NEED TO TELL YOU WHO THE ENEMY IS IN THIS STORY?
"I NEED YOU TO TAKE CARE OF THESE AS IF THEY WERE YOUR OWN SOUL'S MOST PRECIOUS MEMORY.
"NOW, GET YOUR PEOPLE TOGETHER AND JOIN ME.
"IT'S TIME TO TRAVEL TO THE HEART OF THE STORM."

I STILL CANNOT BELIEVE WHAT YOUR EXPERT HAS DONE, FRIAR BUSTOS.
HE HAS THE BEST RECOMMENDATIONS AND...
...HAS KILLED ALL OF OUR BEST MEN?
WELL, YOU SEE...
DO YOU KNOW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE NATIVES DECIDED TO ATTACK NOW?
GOD FORBID.
GOD HAS FORGOTTEN US, FATHER. THIS JUNGLE OBSTRUCTS HIS VIEW SO HE CANNOT OBSERVE US FROM HIS THRONE IN HEAVEN.
LORD!
YOUR LACK OF MANNERS WILL ONLY EARN YOU A ROPE NECKLACE, SWINE. WHAT IS IT?
"SIR, YOU BETTER COME SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE VILLAGE."
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS? SOME SORT OF UPRISING?
NO, MY LORD. WE HAVE COME TO SURRENDER.
AND WHAT IS YOUR CRIME, IF I MAY ASK?
WE ARE WARLOCKS. WE HAVE USED THE DARK ARTS TO KILL YOUR MEN.

CHECK THEM AND LOCK THEM IN THE STABLES. TOMORROW, WE'LL PREPARE SCAFFOLDS FOR JUSTICE AGAINST THESE CRIMINALS.
IT SEEMS YOU WERE TOO HASTY IN TALKING ABOUT THE LORD IN HEAVEN ABANDONING US, ERRASQUIN.
DAMNED IF I UNDERSTAND WHATEVER THE HELL IS HAPPENING HERE.
WELL...
"NOW CAN YOU TELL US THE REST OF THE PLAN, ICH? YOU'VE BROUGHT US HERE TO BE TAKEN AS UNARMED CAPTIVES..."
"UNARMED?"
WE HAVE THE MOST IMPORTANT WEAPON.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WE'RE TOGETHER.
NOW, I NEED YOU TO GIVE ME THE FRAGMENTS.
WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THIS?

SUMMON A STORM.
ARE YOU READY?

WIRACOCHA PROTECT US!
DO NOT BE AFRAID! DON'T YOU SEE?
"ITS ICH!"
GRAAARGHH

TELL US WHAT TO DO AND WE WILL DO IT, ICH.
GROAR
GIVE US A SIGN AND WE SHALL COMPLY YOUR MANDATE.
GRIAAAARGHHHH
CRACK

Urf...
BE NOT AFRAID... IT'S JUST A NIGHTMARE. WE ARE DRUNK... YES! YOU CANNOT DO ANYTHING TO US.
The city smells of silence. Of all that builds up and does not flow.
The beast that has Ich within knows of smells and odors. And he follows one in particular.

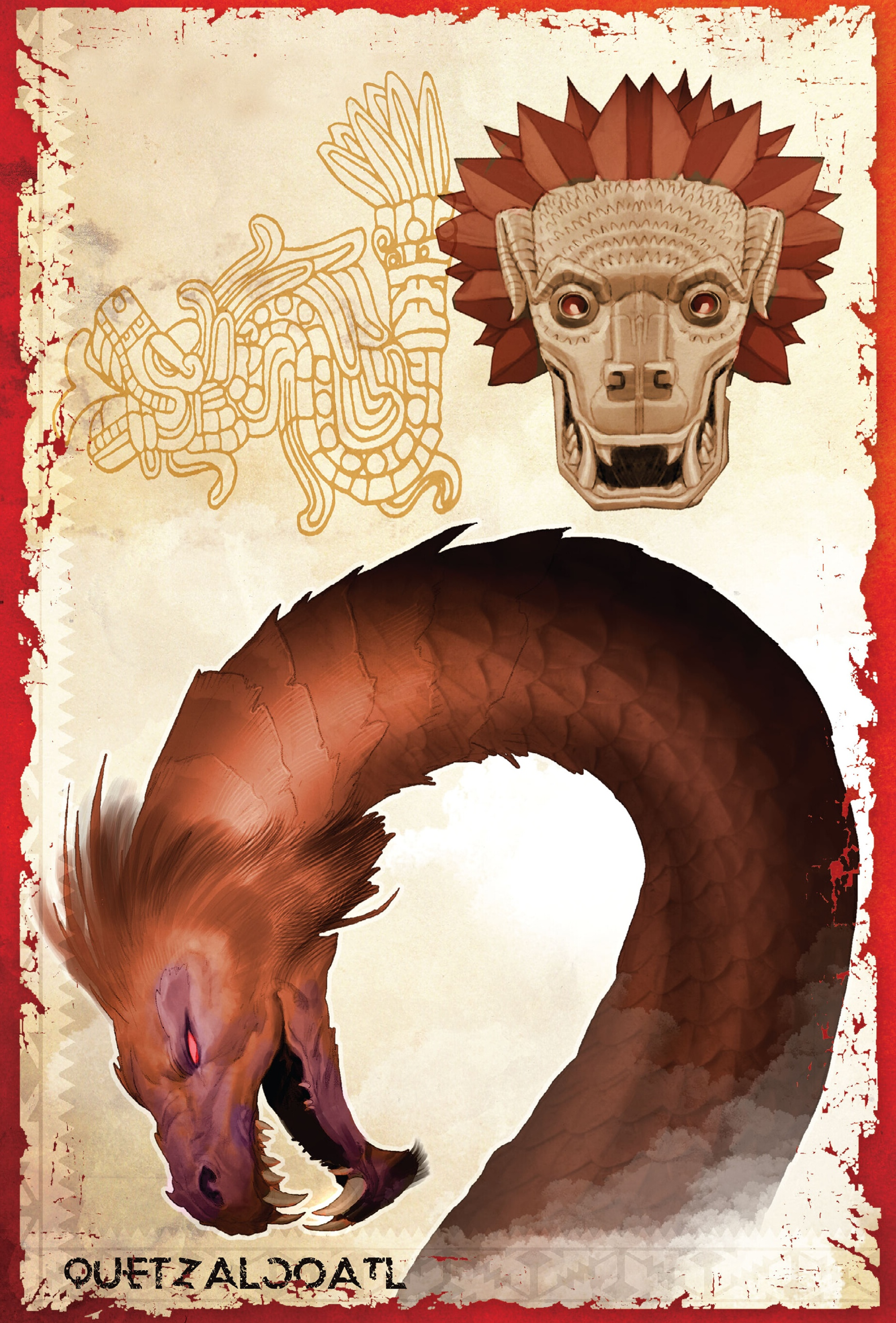
TUMP
TUMP
TUMP
CRASH
BUT WHAT IS THIS ABERRATION?
The beast that has Ich within smells the blood of his brothers on the hands of these two foreigners.

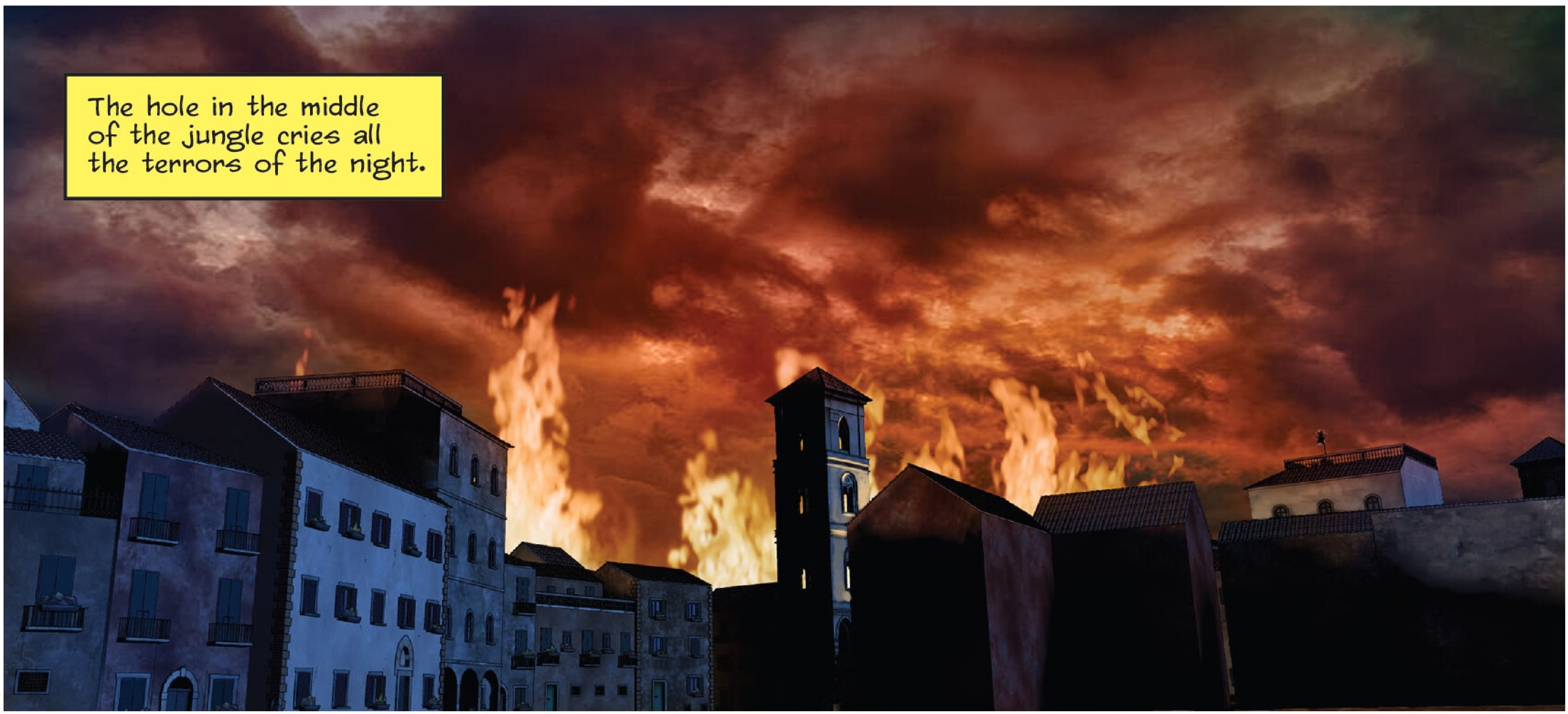
And he walks.
FORGIVE MY SINS, LORD. I WAS A GOOD SOLDIER, AS FAR AS POSSIBLE.
NO TIME FOR PRAYERS, FATHER.
BLAM
THE WORLD STILL NEEDS US.
NO...

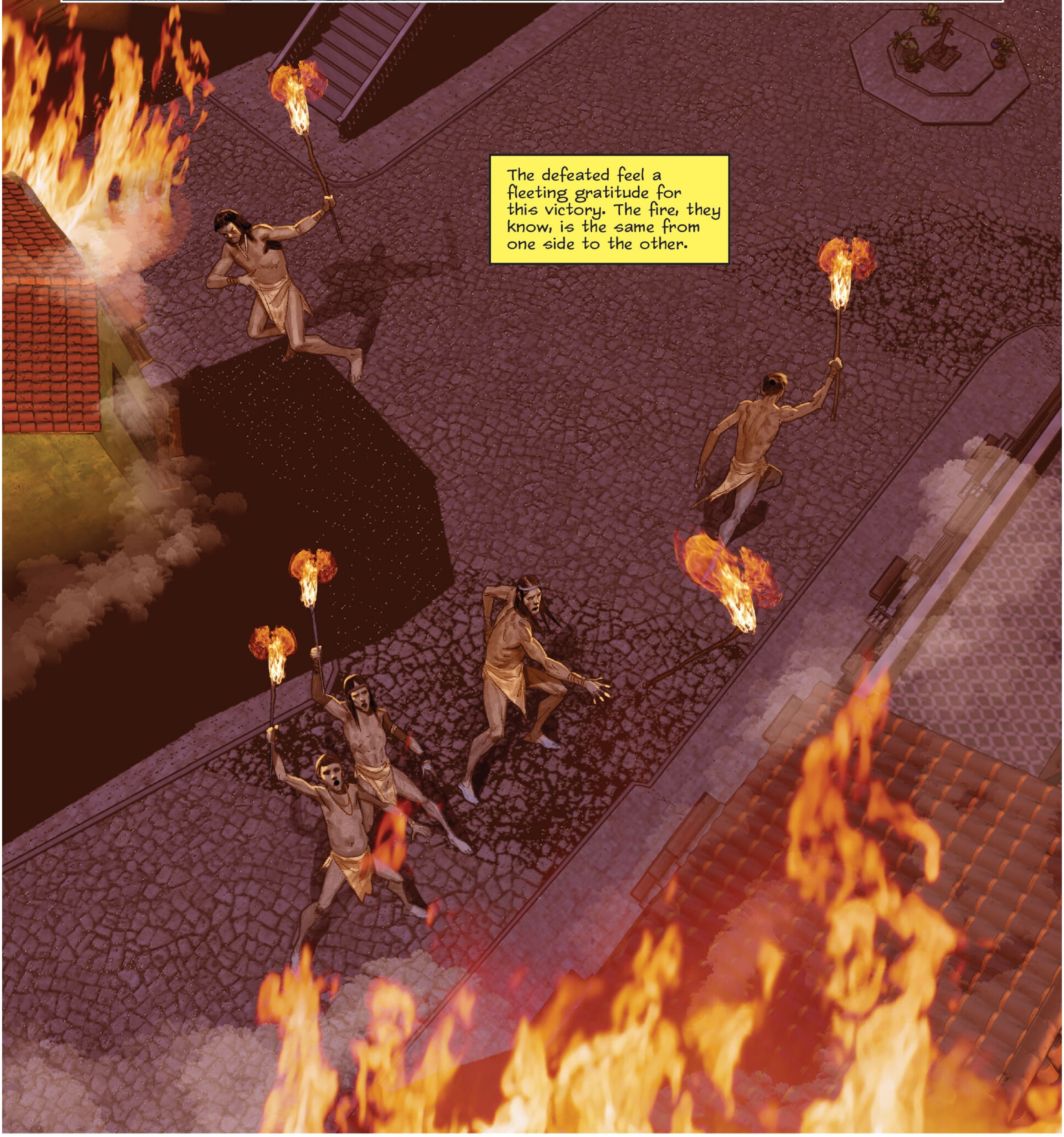
The beast that has Ich within still smells the blood of his brothers. But he feels satisfaction in smelling the new red.
MAKE IT PAINLESS, PLEASE.
HE KILLED LORD ERRASQUIN! LET THERE BE NOTHING LEFT OF THIS INFERNAL BEAST!
Friar Bustos sees and hears what happens in this room. And he knows that he will never sleep again in what is left of his life.
If he has any life left.

The beast that has Ich within turns once more to look at his work.
And he leaves.

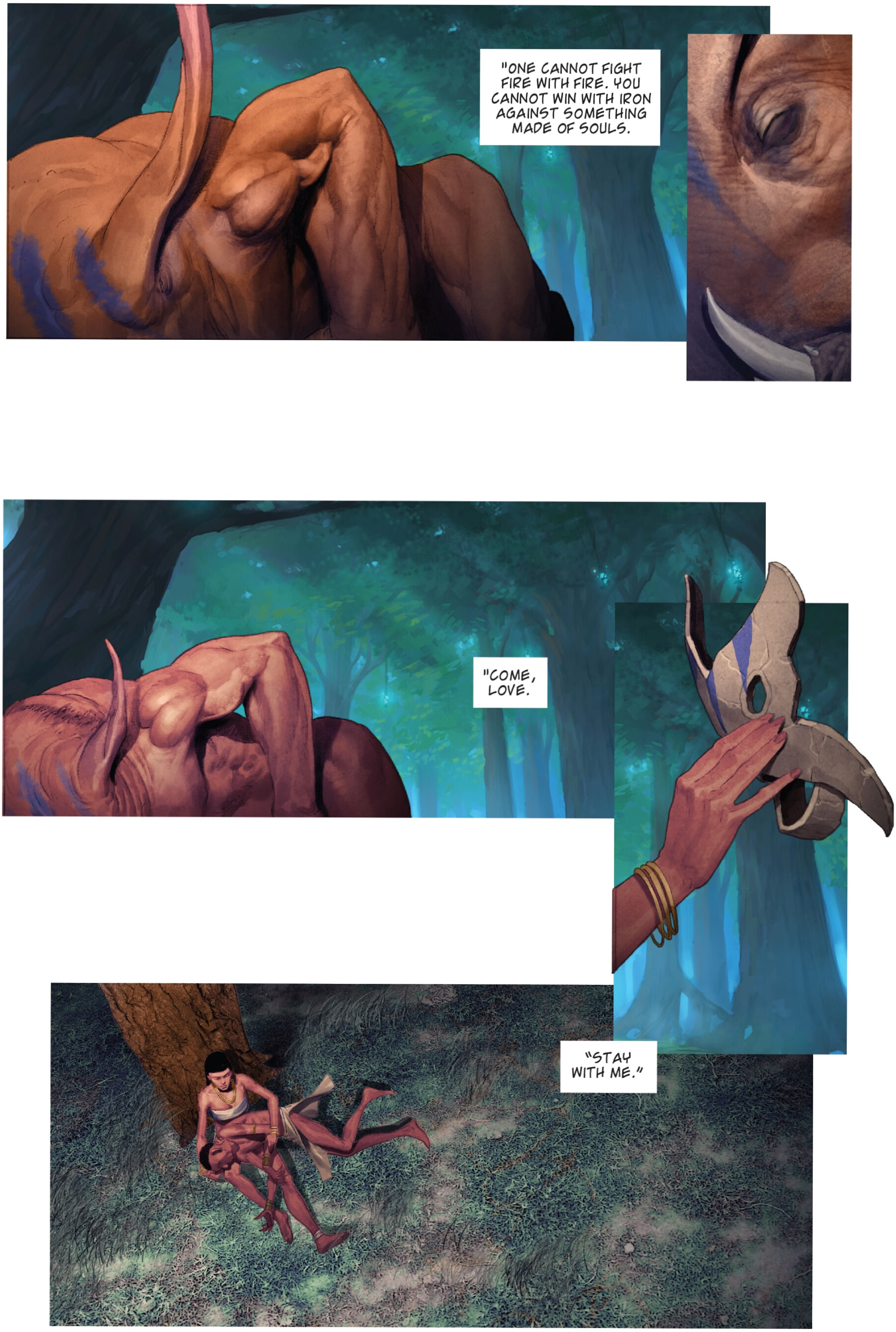
THEY SCREAM LIKE OUR PEOPLE SCREAMED, ICH. THEY BLEED LIKE OUR PEOPLE BLED. THEY FEAR LIKE OUR PEOPLE FEARED. AND THEY DIE JUST LIKE OUR PEOPLE DIED!
PLEASE... HAVE MERCY ON THE CHILDREN...
The beast that has Ich within no longer smells. No longer sees.
All he wants now is to get away from this place. Forever.


QUETZALCOATL


The hole in the middle of the jungle cries all the terrors of the night.


The defeated feel a fleeting gratitude for this victory. The fire, they know, is the same from one side to the other.

An inferno makes its way through Ich.
And Ich does not know how to quench it.
How should he know?
I GAVE YOU THE SONG, LOVE. BUT YOU ONLY UNDERSTOOD THE WORDS.
I SANG THE MELODY IN YOUR EAR. BUT YOU ONLY UNDERSTOOD THE FIRE.
WHEN WE UNDERSTAND WHAT THE MUSIC TELLS US, WE UNDERSTAND WHAT THE EARTH IS TELLING US.


"ONE CANNOT FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE. YOU CANNOT WIN WITH IRON AGAINST SOMETHING MADE OF SOULS.
"COME, LOVE.
"STAY WITH ME."

DID YOU JUST HEAR THE MOON, GERMAN? BEHIND THE SCREAMS AND FIRE... IT SPEAKS ABOUT MANY THINGS.
"IT SAID SOMETHING LIKE 'YOU CANNOT WIN WITH IRON AGAINST SOMETHING MADE OF SOULS.' ISN'T THAT INTERESTING?
"A FAIRLY STRONG OMEN."
MAYBE IT'S TIME TO CHANGE OUR TACTIC.
MAYBE IT'S TIME TO PLAY THEIR GAME.

UGH...
Even with an aching soul, Ich decides to leave. But he listens, and stops.
MNIO... ATHESA... EIOIOIO...
"YARETZI.
"PLEASE."
DO NOT GO.
DO NOT LEAVE ME WITHOUT YOUR SONG.

From above, tragedies are all equal.
You need to approach to discover their nuance.
HOLY MARY... MOTHER OF GOD... PRAY FOR US SINNERS... NOW AND AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH... HOLY MARY... MOTHER OF GOD... PRAY FOR...
COME, GERMAN. WE HAVE TO FINISH WRITING THIS STORY.

YOU KNOW, GERMAN? I'VE BEEN THINKING FOR A WHILE ABOUT THOSE HORRIBLE TUBERS THAT GROW ON THE SLOPES OF THESE MOUNTAINS.
WHAT ARE THEY CALLED? POTATOES? YES. HAVE YOU TASTED THEM? WHAT AN ABERRATION!
"THE POINT IS THAT A FRENCH MERCHANT BROUGHT THESE... THINGS... TO EUROPE IN AN ATTEMPT TO GET RICH. AS WE ARE NOT SAVAGES IN EUROPE, OBVIOUSLY, NOBODY BOUGHT HIS POTATOES. THE POOR MAN WAS ABOUT TO ENTER THE MOST EMBARRASSING OF BANKRUPTCIES.
"BUT HE HAD AN IDEA. THESE STORIES ARE INSTRUCTIVE BECAUSE, AT SOME POINT, SOMEONE HAS AN IDEA. DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE DID?
"HE SET A SIGN UP ON HIS FIELDS, 'STEALING POTATOES FORBIDDEN.' AND PEOPLE, OF COURSE, STOLE THE FORBIDDEN POTATOES.
"THE FRENCH TRADER HAD READ, QUITE CAREFULLY, THAT BOOK WHICH SOME CALL THE BIBLE. HE KNEW ABOUT THE MATTER OF FORBIDDEN FRUIT. LATER, PEOPLE, OF COURSE, HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO COOK THESE POTATOES. AND, WHEN COOKED, THEY GOT USED TO THE EARTHY FLAVOR. AND THE INNS AND PUBS SOON HAD TO INCLUDE DISHES THAT HAD POTATOES ON THEIR MENUS...
"...AND OUR MERCHANT BECAME IMMENSELY RICH.
"THE END."
YOU MAY BE WONDERING, OF COURSE, WHAT THE HELL POTATOES HAVE TO DO WITH WHAT'S GOING ON HERE.
POTATOES ACTUALLY HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH ANYTHING. FOR ME, IT IS ALL ROT.
WHAT MATTERS IS THE STORY. THE TRADER HAD THE INTELLIGENCE TO CHANGE TACTICS AND... A FORTUNE!
WE WILL DO THAT TO CATCH OUR SNEAKY LITTLE MOUSE. WE'LL CHANGE OUR TACTIC. LEAVE THE IRON ASIDE. WE WILL USE THE SOUL.
AREN'T YOU EXCITED, JUST THINKING ABOUT IT?

"HERE, GERMAN? DOES THIS SMELL LIKE A GOOD PLACE?"
WE WILL NOT PURSUE HIM, AS WE DO THE WITCHES IN EUROPE...
...WE'LL GET HIM TO COME DIRECTLY TO US.
"WE'LL CHANGE OUR TACTICS.
"COME, CHILD."
THE WOLF IS LOOKING FOR YOU.

Ich knows what is about to happen.
But he cannot help it.
He approaches his destiny. Like a moth to a flame.
As a crow to the fires of hell.
YOU CALLED ME.
HERE I AM.

WELL...
...SO HERE YOU ARE.
I IMAGINED SOMEONE MORE HEROIC.
YOU, HOWEVER, ARE EXACTLY AS I IMAGINED.
INHUMAN.
WELL! SINCE WE HAVE MADE NECESSARY INTRODUCTIONS...
"WHY DON'T YOU COME DOWN AND WE CAN HAVE A CHAT?
"BUT WHAT TERRIBLE MANNERS! PLEASE FORGIVE ME AND ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MY FRIEND.
"THEY CALL HIM THE GERMAN."

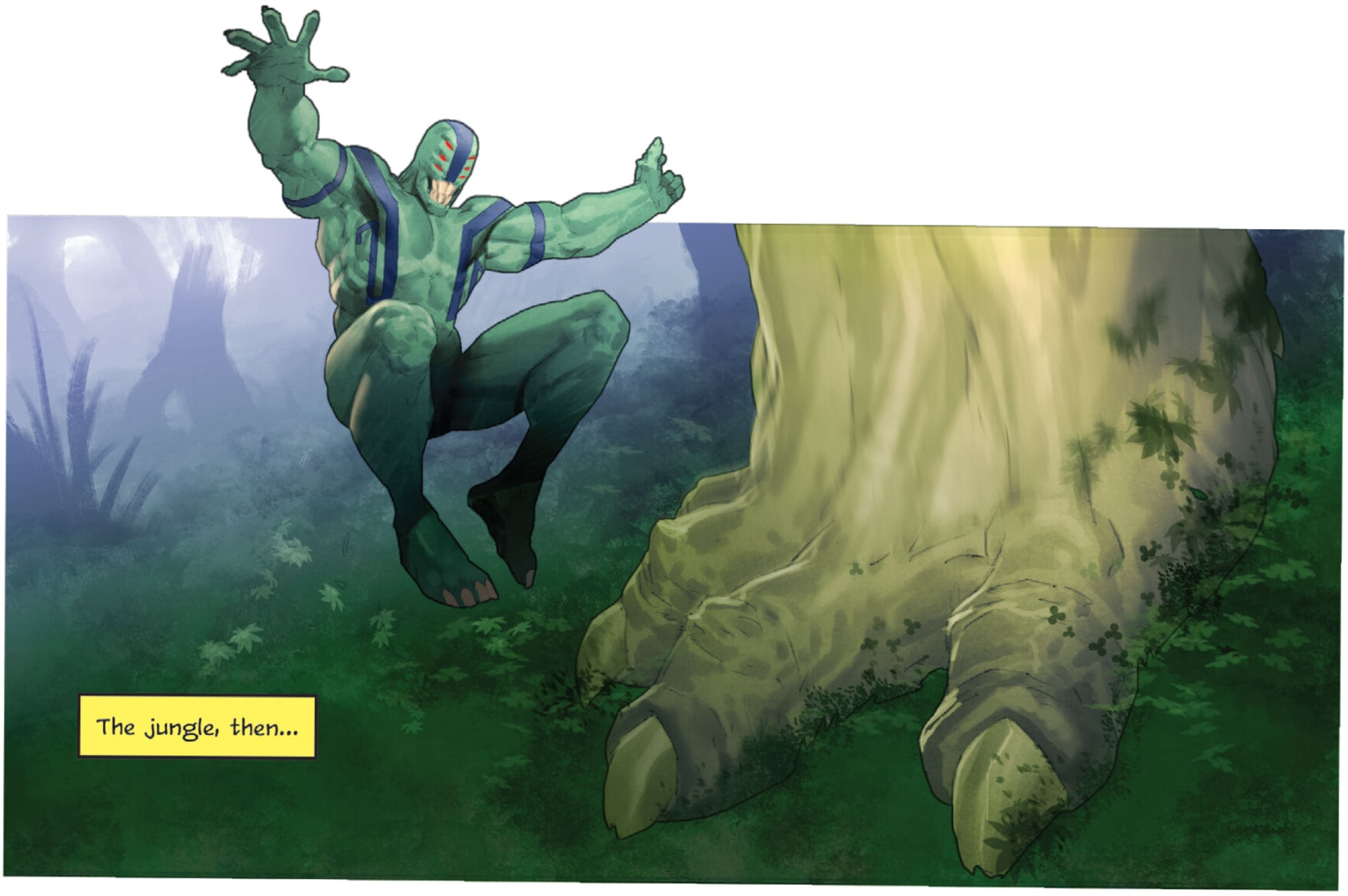
"AND HE IS VERY EXCITED TO MEET YOU."
"THEY CALL ME ICH.
"IT MEANS MASK."

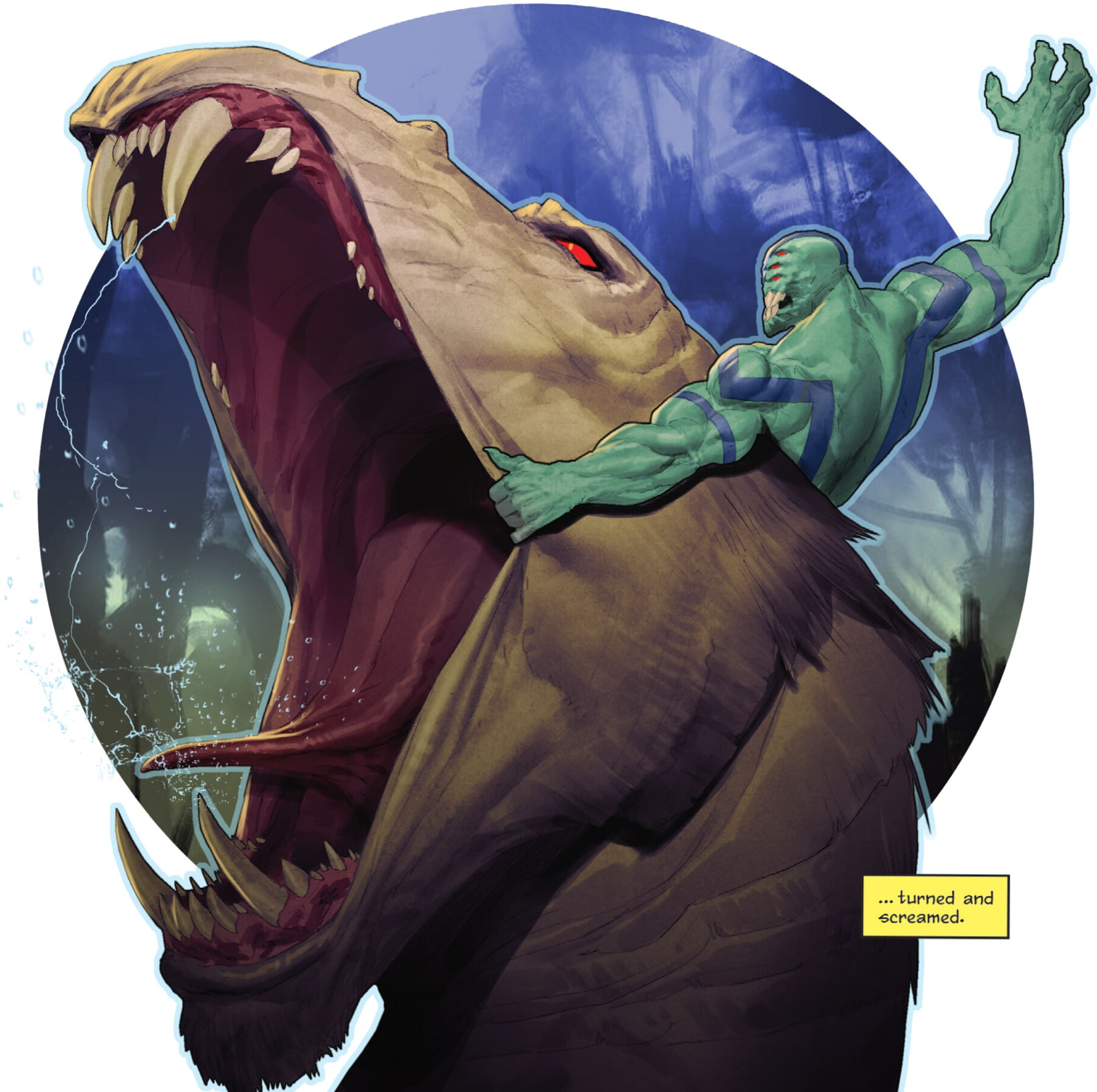
STUMP
CRACK

The God that has Ich within marshaled all his fury against his foe.
And his scream covered the night.
Forever.

I LIKE THIS MASK TRICK... ICH, YOU SAY YOUR NAME WAS? WELL... IN THE LAND OF THE GERMANS, ICH MEANS "I." AND YOU KNOW WHO I AM, BOY?
THE DEVIL. PLEASED TO MEET YOU.
BOO!
Ich saw this scene, in a bowl, thousands of years ago.
But he was not afraid of what was going to happen.

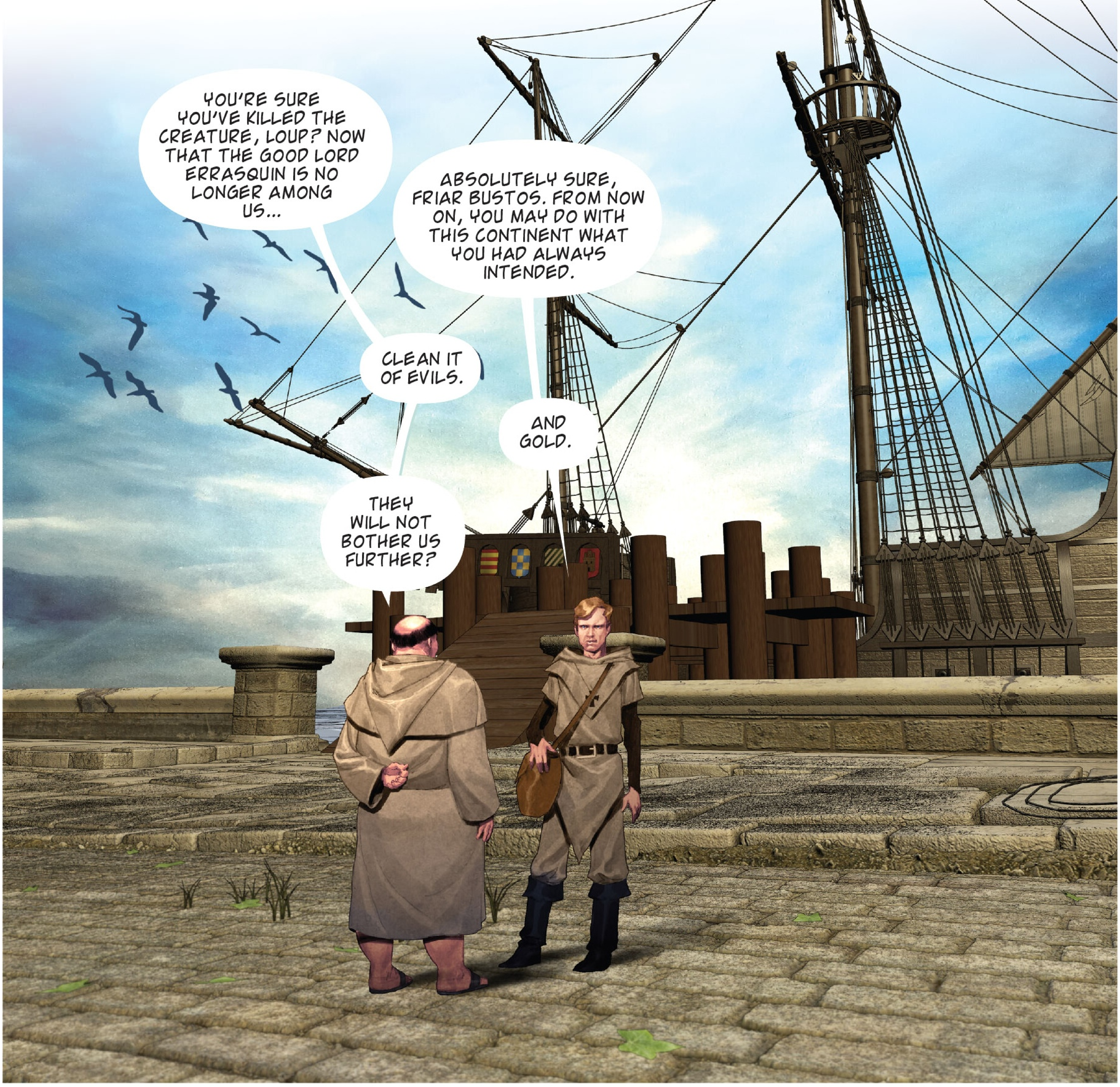
They looked at at each other, God and Devil, for an instant.
And all the stories in the world stopped their "Once Upon A Time."

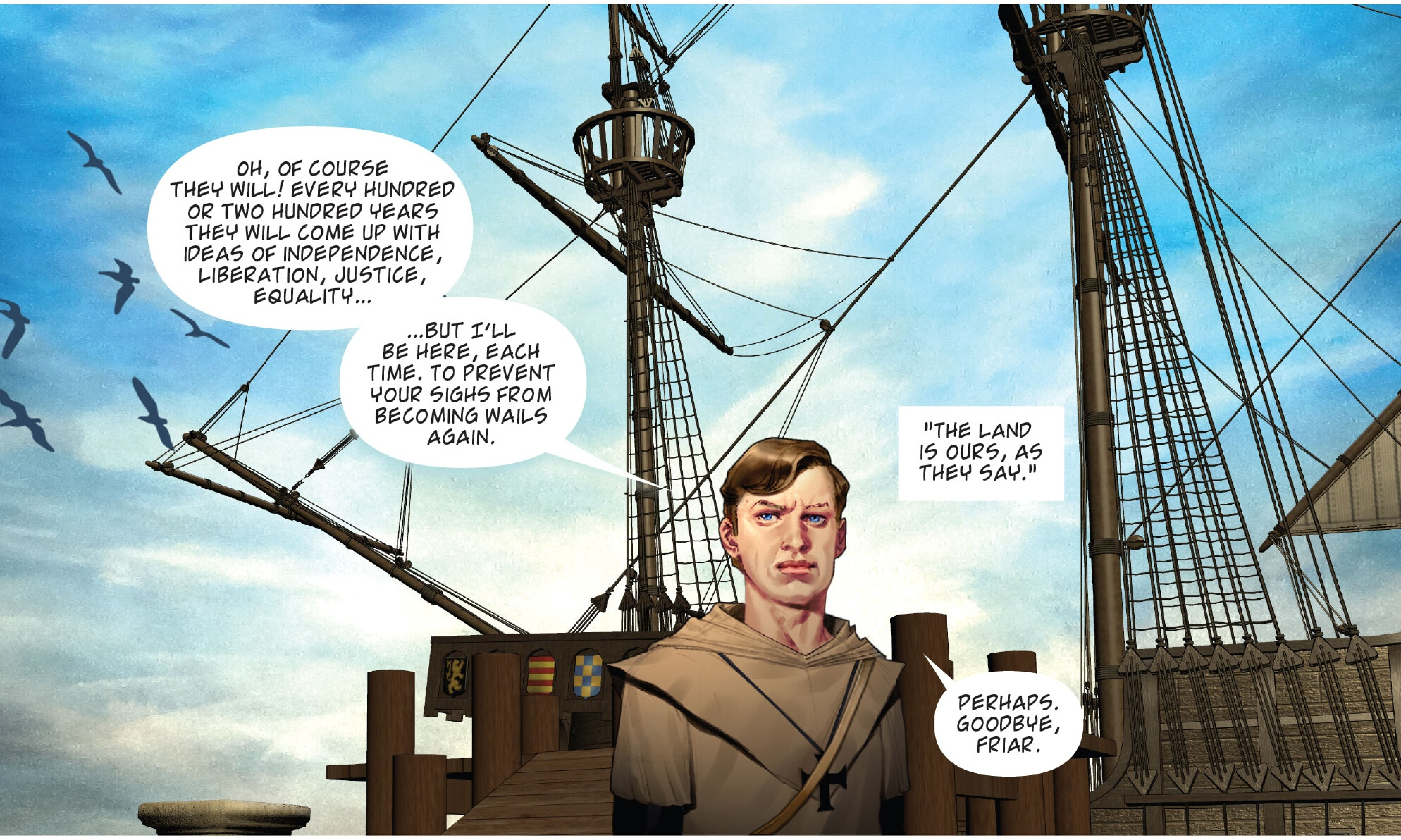

The jungle, then...

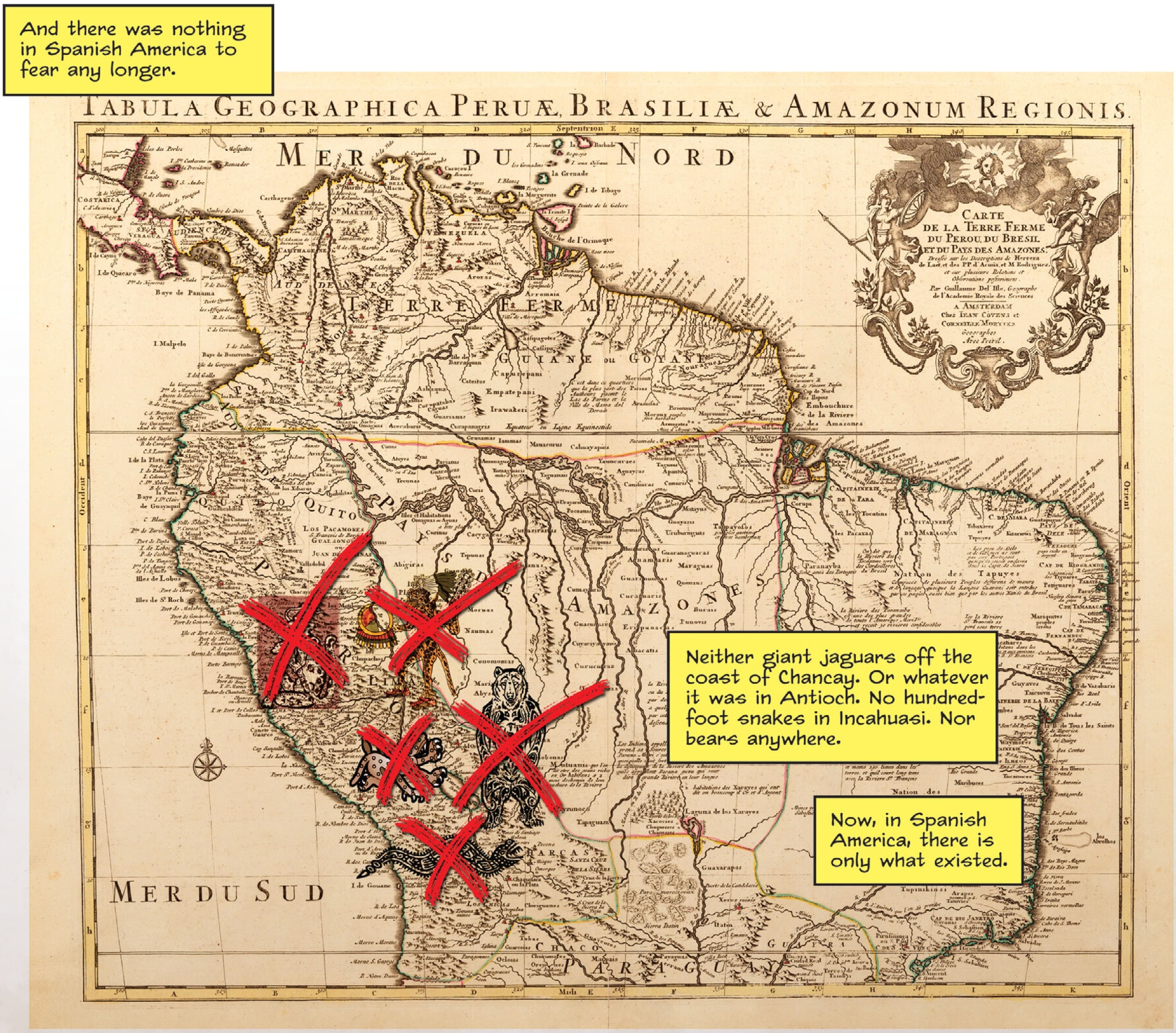

...turned and screamed.

GROAAAAAAAARGH
CRACK
RALGHHH
The mask shatters.
STUMP
As hope shatters.

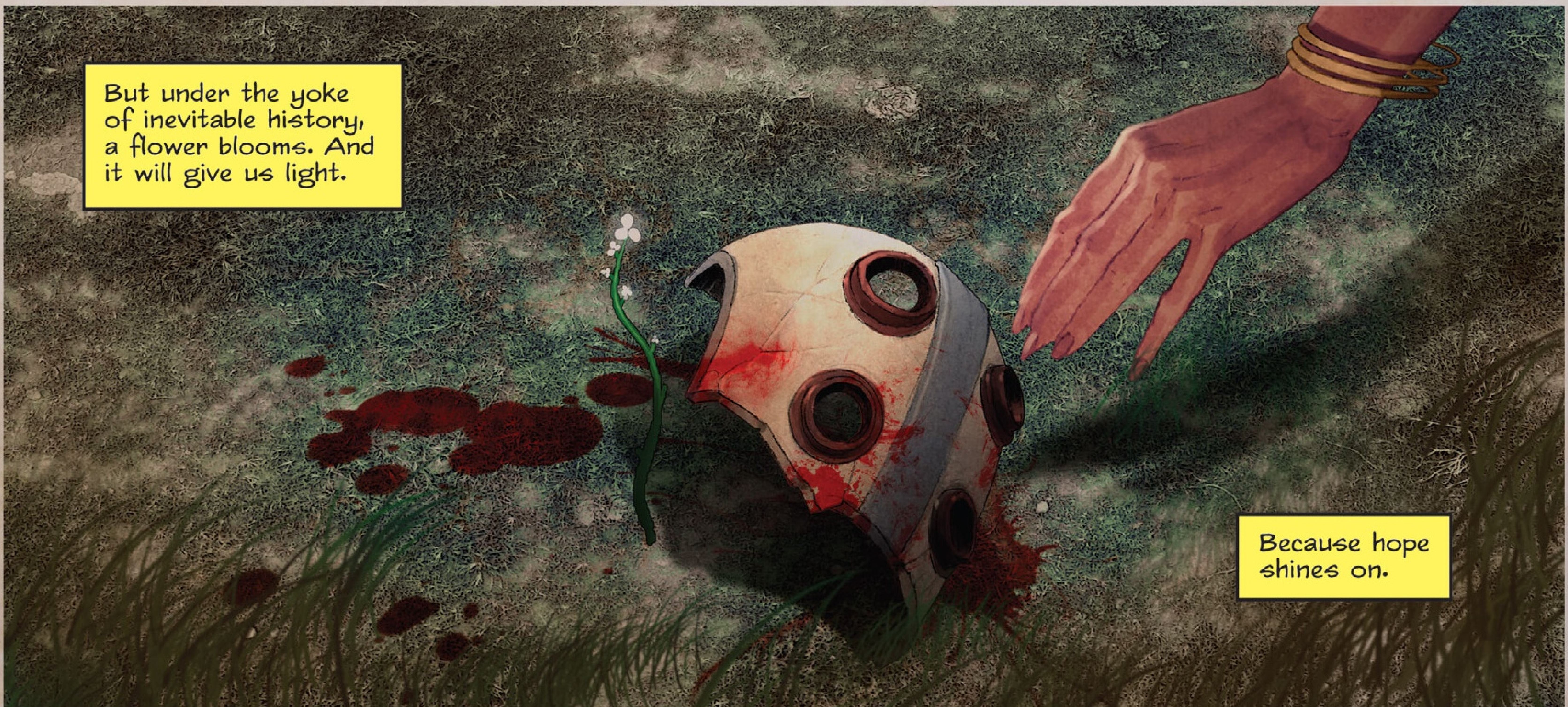
SSSSSSSS
And the end of this story opened up like a furious maw.


YOU'RE SURE YOU'VE KILLED THE CREATURE, LOUP? NOW THAT THE GOOD LORD ERRASQUIN IS NO LONGER AMONG US...
ABSOLUTELY SURE, FRIAR BUSTOS. FROM NOW ON, YOU MAY DO WITH THIS CONTINENT WHAT YOU HAD ALWAYS INTENDED.
CLEAN IT OF EVILS.
AND GOLD.
THEY WILL NOT BOTHER US FURTHER?

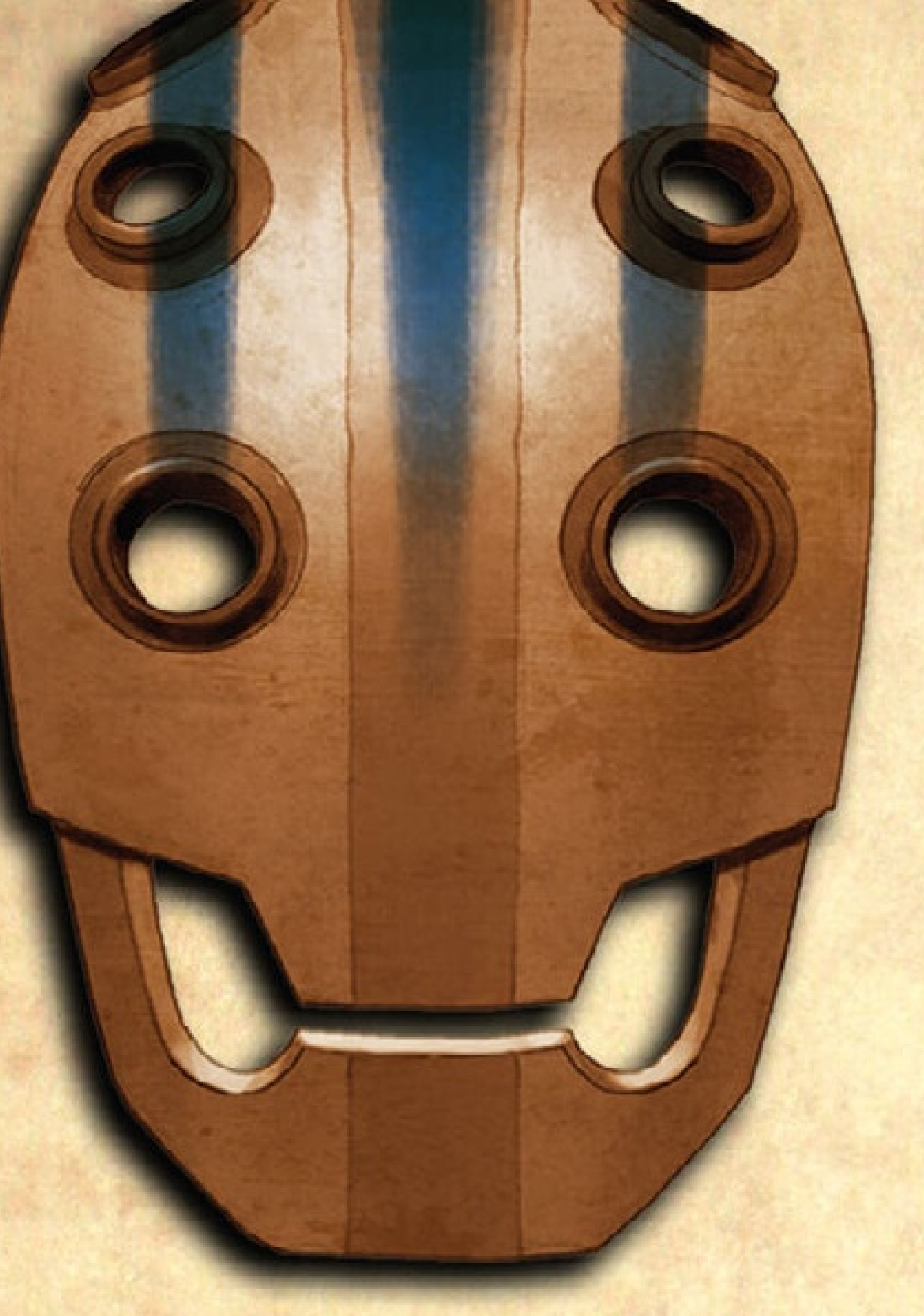

OH, OF COURSE THEY WILL! EVERY HUNDRED OR TWO HUNDRED YEARS THEY WILL COME UP WITH IDEAS OF INDEPENDENCE, LIBERATION, JUSTICE, EQUALITY...
...BUT I'LL BE HERE, EACH TIME. TO PREVENT YOUR SIGHS FROM BECOMING WAILS AGAIN.
"THE LAND IS OURS, AS THEY SAY."
PERHAPS. GOODBYE, FRIAR.

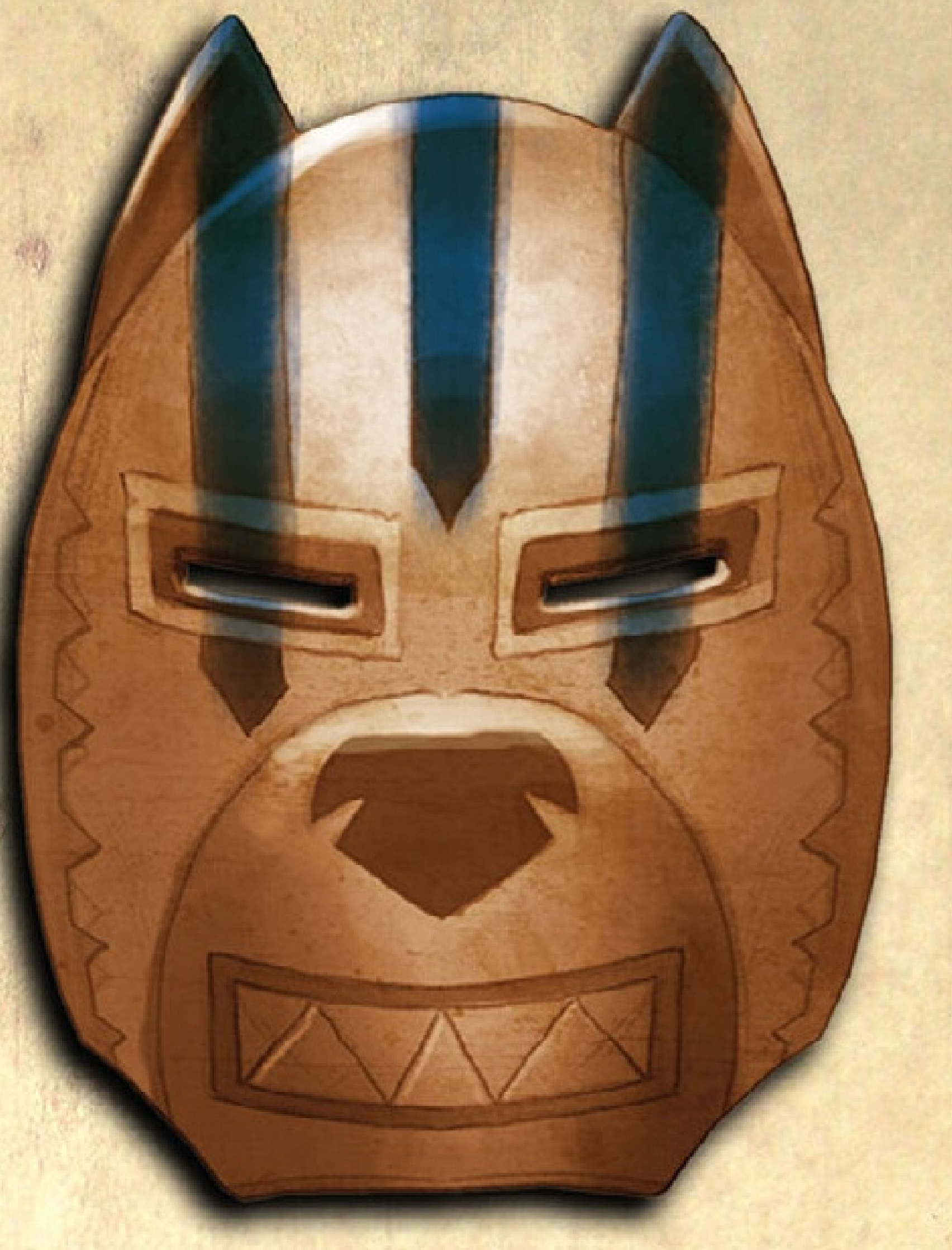

And there was nothing in Spanish America to fear any longer.
TABULA GEOGRAPHICA PERUÆ, BRASILIÆ & AMAZONUM REGIONIS.
MER DU NORD
CARTE DE LA TERRE FERME DU PEROU, DU BRESIL ET DU PAYS DES AMAZONES
TERRE FERME
AMAZONES
MER DU SUD
Neither giant jaguars off the coast of Chancay. Or whatever it was in Antioch. No hundred-foot snakes in Incahuasi. Nor bears anywhere.
Now, in Spanish America, there is only what existed.

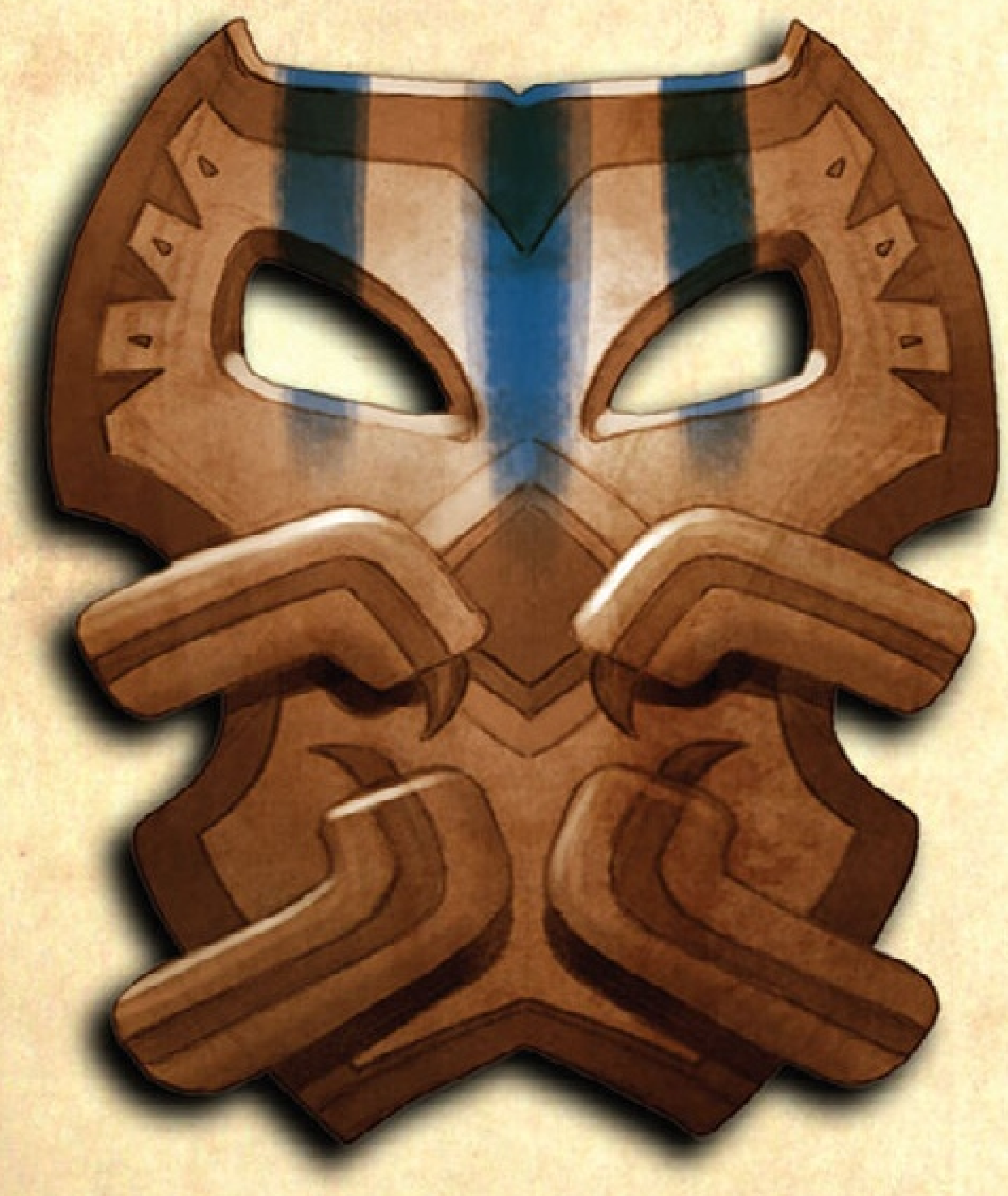
Some endings cannot be rewritten.

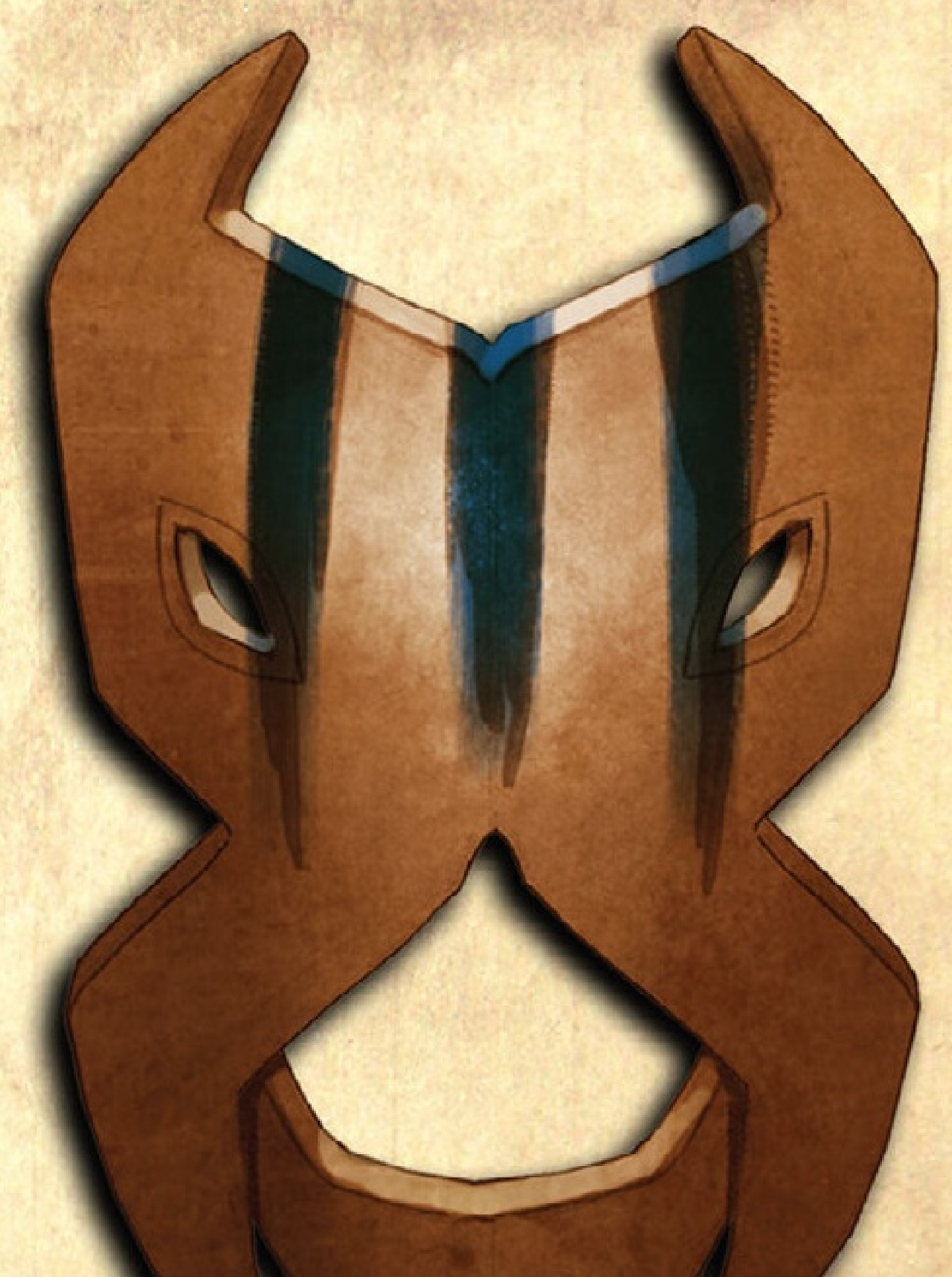

But under the yoke of inevitable history, a flower blooms. And it will give us light.
Because hope shines on.

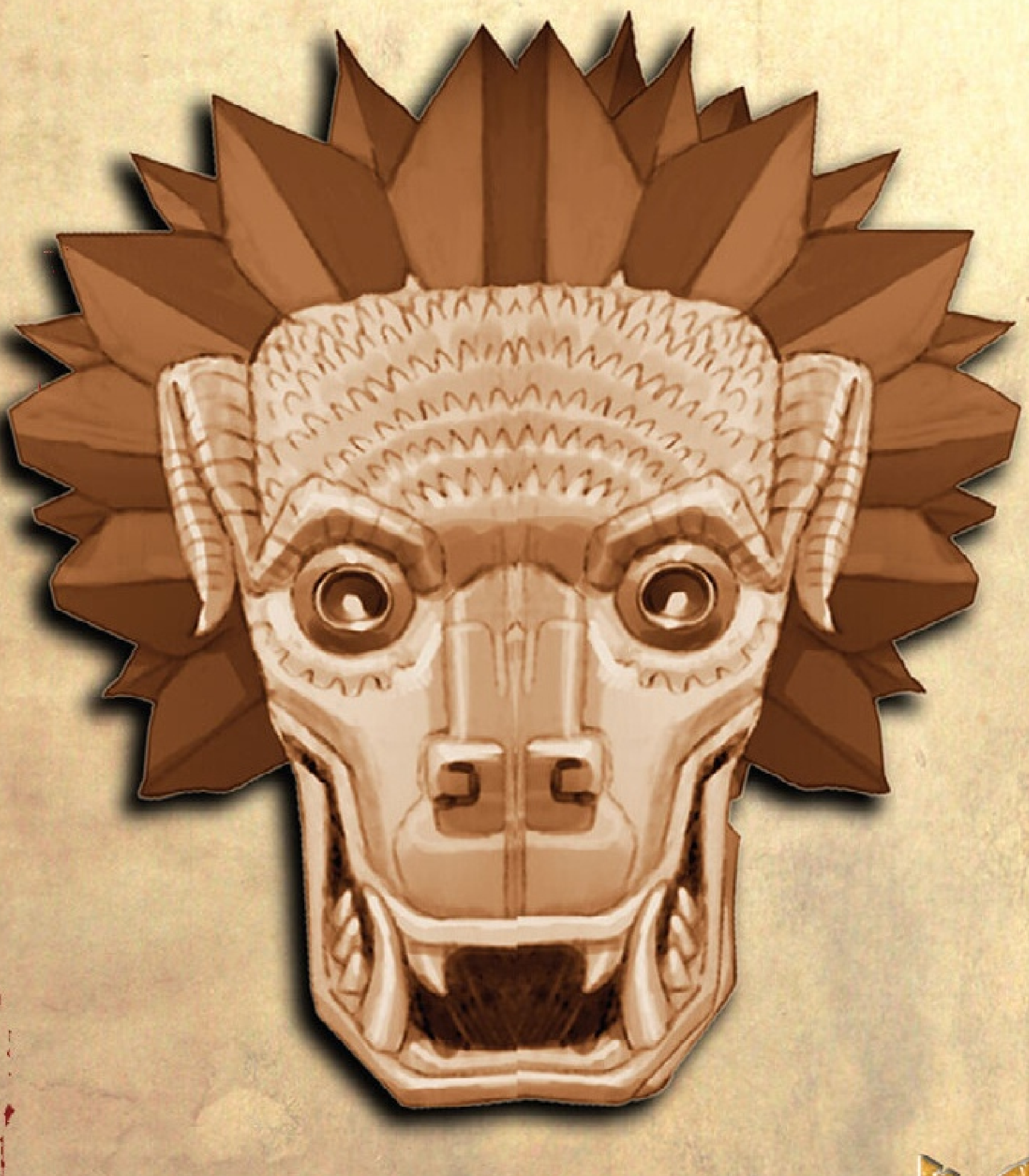
The End

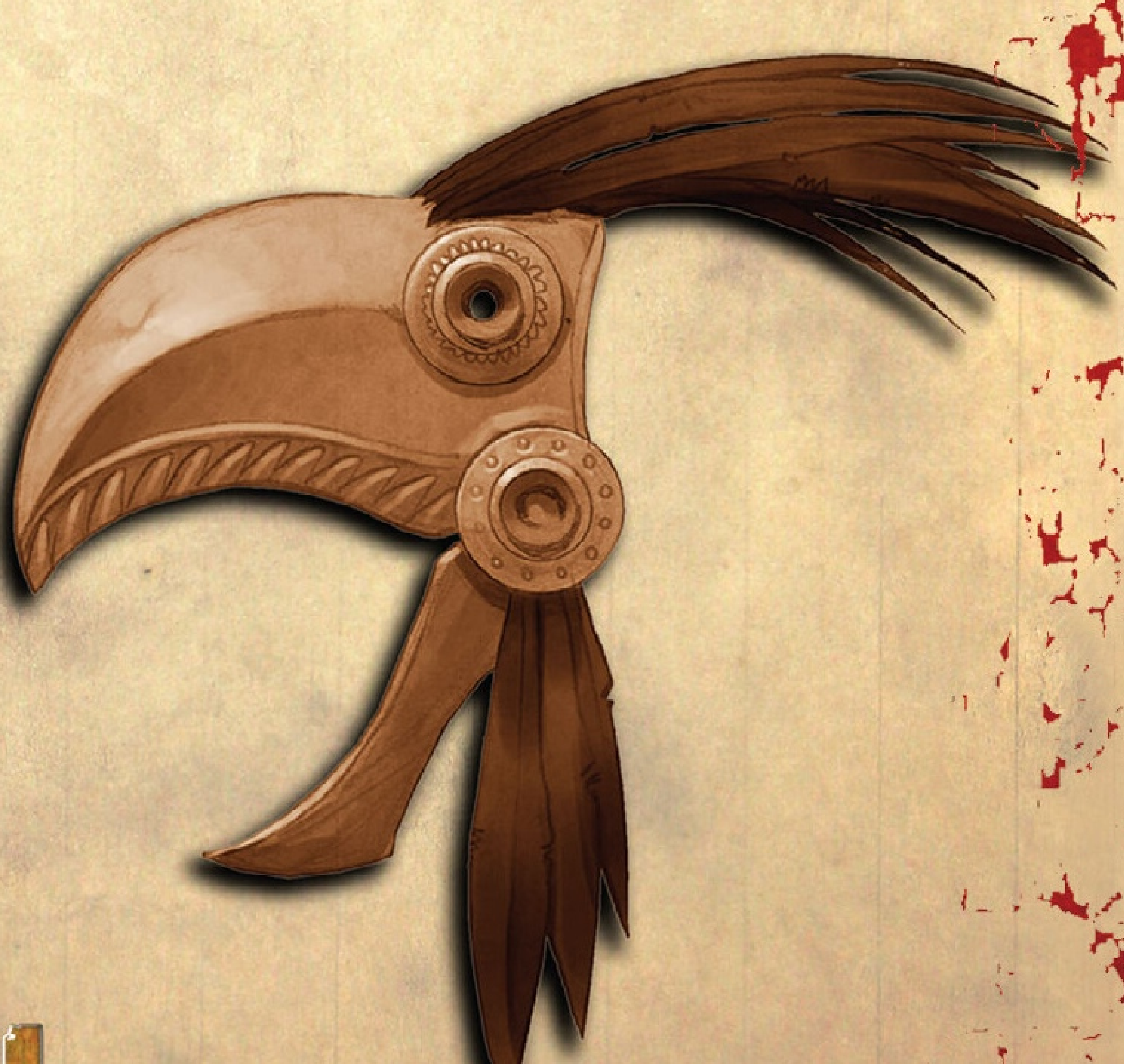












ICH

BRUTAL NATURE

CONCRETE FURY

I could ask myself a thousand questions at a time like this.
Most of them would refer to my new biological structure, the concept of the impossible, and other issues along those lines.
But before reaching those questions, there are two bouncing off my new skull as if they were the sound of an infernal gong:
a) "How did I get here?"
"How the hell do I get out of this?"

Come here, you little...
GRIARRR
That burns, motherfucker!
AAAGH
Wow!
That scream was pretty good.

And now it would be better to put an end to these toys.
Let's see if this monster form's aim is as good as my human aim.
BOOM
Sure is!
Take one down and two more take its place. Great.
Are these drones branded "Hydra", perhaps?
I would continue this conversation with you to find out what the hell is going on here. But, you know...
"He who fights and runs..." and all that.

GEORGIE... IS THAT MONSTER FLYING IN THE SKY?
APPARENTLY, MARGARET.
AH.
AND THAT MONSTER'S ALSO CHASING FLYING SAUCERS, GEORGIE?
UNDOUBTEDLY, MARGARET.
WOW.
THAT MUST HAVE HURT THE MONSTER, DON'T YOU THINK, GEORGIE?
LIKE THE DICKENS, MARGARET.
POOR BOY.
WHAT DID WE NEED TO BUY AT THE MARKET, GEORGIE?
CABBAGES, MARGARET.
RIGHT.
DID YOU SAY "DICKENS", GEORGIE?
ABSOLUTELY NOT, MARGARET.
GOOD BOY.

AAARGHHH
In case all of my vital organs remain the same inside, this has to have hit one.
They say broken hearts hurt. I won't deny it, but I can attest that a bullet from a high tech drone hurts even worse.
Desperate times...
GRRRAARPHHH
...call for desperate measures.
CRASH

Railroad station...
If I can just...
I *can!*
If everything didn't hurt like hell and I wasn't being chased by an army of angry drones while bleeding to death...
...this would be the most beautiful moment of my life.

1
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15
THE SUBJECT IS HEADING TO THE RAILROAD AREA.
IF HE GETS THERE, WE LOSE HIM. THERE ARE TUNNELS THAT...
HE WON'T MAKE IT.
HOW CAN YOU KNOW THAT?
CALL IT FEMININE INTUITION, MR. WOLF.
OR A "NO-BRAINER."
NOTHING IN HEAVEN OR ON EARTH CAN SURVIVE LONG WITH AN INJURY LIKE THAT.
"THERE ARE MORE THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH, HORATIO, THAN ARE DREAMT OF IN YOUR PHILOSOPHY."
EXCUSE ME, MR. WOLF?
SHAKESPEARE, EDITH. THE GREATEST WRITER OF TRAGEDIES OF ALL TIME.
AND IF YOU'LL ALLOW ME A CONFESSION, I LOOK FORWARD TO THIS TRAGEDY TILTING IN FAVOR OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

Come on, big guy. You can do it...
...just a little more.
It's not that far...
No...

WITHOUT A DOUBT, SON...
...I CAN SAY WITH CONFIDENCE THAT WE HAVE FINALLY FOUND, AT LAST, OUR ICH.

ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO TRY THIS AGAIN, MR. WOLF?
THE LAST TIME THE RESULTS WERE... NOT SATISFACTORY... AND YOUR BODY WAS TWENTY YEARS YOUNGER.
YOU'RE CORRECT, DR. SHEEL. IT'S BEEN TWENTY YEARS SINCE WE LAST HAD ONE OF THESE PRICELESS ARTIFACTS.
AND IN TWENTY YEARS, WE'VE IMPROVED A LOT.
ARE YOU GOING TO DENY US THE UNLIMITED PLEASURE OF THE GAME?
AS YOU WISH. IT IS MY DUTY TO MENTION THE RISKS INVOLVED.
AND IT IS MY HONOR TO HAVE ON MY TEAM A PHYSICIAN AS SCRUPULOUS AS YOU, DR. SHEEL.
IF THAT WAS A JOKE, MR. WOLF, LET ME SAY THAT I DO NOT SEE THE HUMOR IN IT.

MISS EDITH? IF OUR WORTHY MR. THOMAS S. WOLF STILL WISHES TO DIE A SLOW, PAINFUL AND ABSURD DEATH, YOU MAY PROCEED.
UNDERSTOOD, DR. SHEEL.
QUESTION EVERYTHING
123
89/V..
012.
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12.0
CAUTION
ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO GO THROUGH WITH THIS?
I'VE NEVER FELT STRONGER.
THE LAST TIME...
THE LAST TIME YOU WERE BUT A CHILD, EDITH.
NOW YOU WILL DO BETTER.
SHALL WE?
SOMETHING TELLS ME IT WILL WORK AGAIN.

HHHH...

GRIARRRGHHH!
I WOULD RECOMMEND ABORTING THE EXPERIMENT, MISS EDITH...
LET'S WAIT A MINUTE, DR. SHEEL.
THE AORTA HAS MUTATED DISPROPORTIONATELY TO THE ARTERIES.
IF THE ILIAC ARTERY CAN'T CONTAIN THE BLOOD FLOW COMING IN FROM THE AORTIC ARCH, ALL THAT FLOW WILL MOVE TO THE MEDIAN SACRAL ARTERY.
WHAT ARE THE RISKS?
"THE RISKS?
"WELL..."
aVL
aVF
aVL
V2
67
V3
V5
234

"MR. THOMAS S. WOLF IS ABOUT TO EXPLODE."

I'M SORRY, THOMAS.
I ALSO HAD FAITH THAT THIS TIME IT WOULD WORK.
NEXT TIME, WE'LL SUCCEED.

This time I dreamed of dreams that did not belong to me.
The dreams of hundreds of souls dreaming within my own soul.
Dreams of all the stories in the world within my own story.
Until I stopped dreaming...
... and returned to having just one soul, within my own body.
DO YOU ALWAYS CRY WHEN YOU SLEEP?
WHERE AM I? AND WHO ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE?
DO NOT PUSH YOURSELF. THE WOUND WAS DEEP.
WOUND? MY HOUSE... I...
MY NAME IS XUE.
IT MEANS "SNOW."

MY NAME'S CURT, AND IT MEANS "WHAT THE HELL AM I DOING HERE? IS THIS A KIDNAPPING?"
NOTHING LIKE THAT. YOU'VE SIMPLY BEEN REBORN.
IT HURTS, RIGHT?
THIS ISN'T A HOSPITAL AND YOU'RE NOT A GODDAMN NURSE.
WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME?
YOU DON'T NEED THEM. NOT ONE THING OR THE OTHER.
ACUPUNCTURE TO RESTORE YOUR SOUL.
LEI GONG TENG WINE TO REDUCE THE FEVER.
CACTUS PULP TO CLOSE THE WOUND.
CORYDALIS YANHUSUO ROOT FOR THE PAIN.
GOU QI ZI SO YOUR CIRCULATORY SYSTEM NORMALIZES.
HUANG QI TO LOWER INFLAMMATION.
SHAN ZHA TO STRENGTHEN THE HEART.
KAWA-KAWA SO YOU HAVE NICE DREAMS AND FISH HEAD SOUP FOR YOUR...
ENOUGH!
YOU THINK I WAS BORN YESTERDAY? YOU DRUGGED ME TO GET... MY KIDNEY... MY LIVER... OR SOMETHING... AND NOW...
DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT, ICH?
IT'S CURT, OKAY? AND OF COURSE I BELIEVE THAT!
YOU DRUGGED ME SO MUCH THAT I DREAMED OF TURNING INTO A MONSTER AND THAT ROBOTS WERE CHASING ME AND...

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING, THEY WERE MILITARY DRONES.
AND, IF WE KEEP TO THE LITERAL DICTIONARY DEFINITION OF THE WORD "MONSTER"—THAT SAYS THAT A MONSTER IS SOMETHING UNIQUE IN ITS SPECIES—THEN... YES.
YOU BECAME A MONSTER, ICH.
CURT! I DON'T KNOW WHO THE HELL ICH IS.
WE'VE BEEN WAITING YEARS FOR YOUR ARRIVAL.
MY...? IS THIS ONE OF THOSE TV SHOWS WHERE YOU SHOOT UNDERCOVER AND THEN PRANK ME IN FRONT OF THE WHOLE WORLD?
WELL... NO.
THIS IS THE REAL WORLD.
CAN YOU HOLD THIS, PLEASE?

"RELAX, THOMAS."
I IMAGINE YOU HAD A HARD DAY.
NOTHING THAT CAN'T BE SOLVED WITH A SOFT TOUCH, DON'T YOU THINK?
IS THERE A PLACE FOR ME ON THAT BED?
"AND PROPER MEDICAL TREATMENT, OF COURSE."

I ALWAYS WONDER WHAT YOU DREAM OF, WHEN THIS HAPPENS.
I LOVE LISTENING TO YOUR HEART RIGHT NOW. IT'S LIKE... AS IF RETURNING FROM A BATTLE, READY TO FIGHT ANOTHER ONE.
I IMAGINE EVERY PARTICLE OF YOUR BODY REGENERATING. EACH ATOM STRIVING TO BECOME STRONGER. EVERY THOUGHT GOING OFF LIKE A REVOLUTION.
EDITH?
"I'M HERE, MY LOVE."
YOU DON'T KNOW HOW HAPPY I AM TO HAVE RETURNED HOME.
AND YOU DON'T KNOW HOW BEAUTIFUL IT IS TO WAIT, EVERY TIME.

CALL 029 987 665
FOR RENT
PARKING

WHAT'S THIS?
IT'S YOU.
WELL, I ONLY SEE A MASK.
IS THAT NOT WHAT WE SEE IN THE MIRROR EVERY DAY?

ARE YOU TRYING TO TELL ME I'M... A *DRAGON?*
I AM TELLING YOU THAT THE DRAGON LIVES INSIDE YOU.
YOU ARE THE DRAGON AND THOUSANDS MORE. THE MASK IS SIMPLY A WINDOW.
AM I...?
CURT. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE ALWAYS CALLED YOU *ICH*.
ALWAYS? BUT I JUST MET YOU!
WE, HOWEVER, HAVE KNOWN ABOUT YOU FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.
COME. LET ME TELL YOU A STORY.

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS NOTHING, YOU KNOW? THERE'S AN IRREFUTABLE TRUTH IN THAT PHRASE.
THIS THE PART WHERE YOU RECITE THE BIBLE, OLD MAN?
NO. THIS IS THE PART WHERE I TELL YOU THE TRUTH.
THEN, THE MASKS WERE MADE. WITH FIRE, EARTH, AIR, WATER. WITH MAGIC.
A MASK FOR EVERY LIVING BEING.
A MASK FOR EVERY CREATURE BORN.
A MASK TO GIVE LIFE TO THE FIRST OF EACH SPECIES.
"THESE MASKS HAVE BEEN SCATTERED BY THE GREATER FORCES IN PLACES WHERE THE CREATURES FIRST EXISTED.
"NATURALLY, MANY MASKS HAVE BEEN LOST OVER THE AGES. YOU KNOW... FLOODS, EARTHQUAKES. THE LAW OF ETERNAL CHANGE SOMETIMES BURIES THEM AND OTHERS GET GROUND UP SO THAT THE FLOWER CAN REGROW."
IF EVERY CREATURE WAS CREATED FROM A MASK, THEN HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM.
DRAGONS DO NOT EXIST.
"DON'T THEY?"
THE ISSUE IS THAT THERE IS A... LET'S CALL IT "POWER"... THAT HAS NOT BEEN LOST SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME. WE CALL IT ICH.
IT IS A FORCE THAT DWELLS IN ONE AND ONLY ONE PERSON AT A TIME.
WHEN THE HUMAN BEING CEASES TO LIVE ON THIS PLANE, THE ICH CARRIER MOVES ON TO THE NEXT... AND SO ON.
IF I'M FOLLOWING YOUR DELIRIOUS RAMBLING, OLD MAN, YOU'RE SUGGESTING THAT I HAVE THIS ICH INSIDE MY BODY AT THIS TIME.
I'M TELLING YOU THAT YOU ***ARE*** ICH, BOY.

YOU'RE SERIOUSLY NOT TIRED OF THIS SAME OLD STORY, EDITH?
YOU ALWAYS RECOUNT IT WHEN YOU RETURN. AND IT ALWAYS FASCINATES ME.
WHY SHOULD THIS TIME BE DIFFERENT?
BECAUSE IT HAPPENED SO MANY YEARS AGO.
"So many, that it is useless to specify an amount.
"I'd been following the trail of a legend for a long while.
"A legend of masks and their power, as you know.
"And then..."
PAZUZU!
"... it happened."

"They had found a temple—or something like that—dedicated to Pazuzu, King of the Wind Demons. Son of Hanbi.
"Evil incarnate.
"I'll be damned if that statue's glare did not have some kind of hypnotic power. It seemed to boil one's soul, if you looked at it head on.
"And that's why, while everyone else's soul was boiling...
"...I found what I was looking—or rather that it found me.
"You've heard my heart, Edith, pounding when it fills up with life.
"Multiply that, and you'll know what was going on inside me at that moment."

DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S IN YOUR SOUL, STRANGER?
WHAT?
I'M ASKING IF YOU HAVE LEARNED TO LOOK WITHIN.
HAHAHAHA
HAHAHA

"I know what I'm going to say sounds quite unlikely.
"But at that moment, I was about to give up everything.
"Years of looking for what i held in my trembling hands. Sleepless nights. Fevers. Unwanted thoughts that bordered madness.
"And I almost dropped the mask at my feet.
"But i did not.
"In the name of all that is unholy...
"...I did not!"
AHHHH!

"Every atom. Every cell. Every drop of my being...
"... mutated.
"Torn.
"Screaming.
"Each bone melted and cracked, and then reset.
"My skin stretched to impossible lengths. And then stretched further.
"My throat could not contain the shriek of pain that gripped me because that pain was beyond anything I could contain."

"I was all of Pazuzu's wisdom.
"All of Pazuzu's fury.
"And there was something inside me that initially felt unknown but that soon became quite clear..."

"Hunger!
"I had, within me, a hellish hunger."
HEIN?
HA HA HA!
AHHHH!

EV HER TIM WEKI DIQEWIME.
LE BELE, EW E BI CI.
CI LI VIR DIQEWIME?
EZ DIFIKIRIM KU...
AHHHHH!
CIMA HUN DIQIRIN?
YAAARGH!

"My hunger was sated. But now I was dominated by an unspeakable pain that I could not master.
"I was the devil and yet I bled.
"They were small and weak.
"Ants against the horror of my warped body."
CRACK
"But they were more. They knew their true nature and I was just a newcomer to my new form.
RATATATATATAT
"And they also had a few tricks up their sleeves."

EZ WI BIDIN.
"I could not tell if I died at that moment, Edith.
"Yes, I felt that I disappeared. Flowed out, like a river. Or as the lava that grows tired of the volcano.
"All the evil of creation scurried out of me as if I were not worthy.
"And I felt like the most miserable and fragile being in the universe."

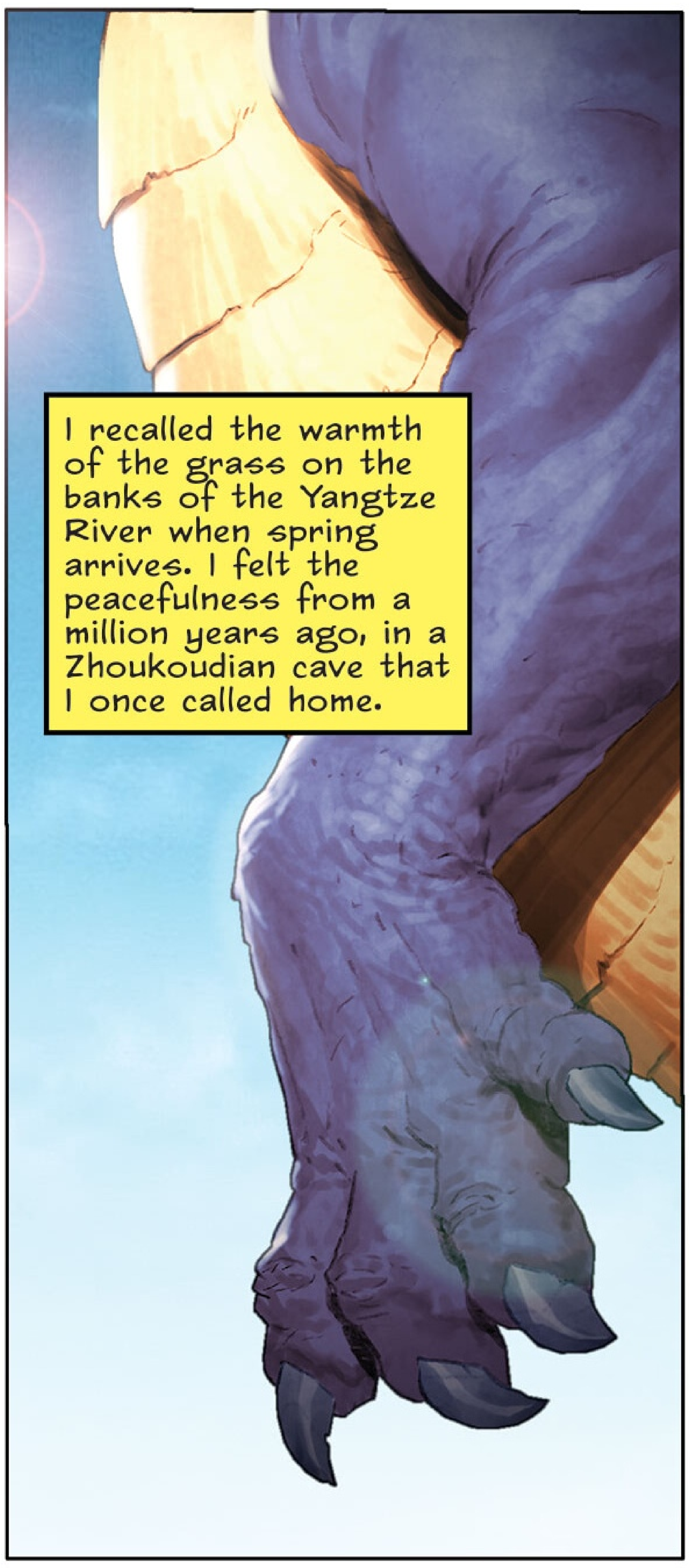
"To explain how I came to be sitting inside the plane that would bring me back home would be to bore you with stories of hospitals, favors between governments, and even more stupefying things.
"The truth is that no one asked questions about it.
"All that witnessed this madness were silenced, forever.
Croix Rouge Libanaise
"I guess these things happen all the time.
"In my mind, one concept was clear: that which I had sought for decades existed.
"To this day, I could never find the other half of the mask of Pazuzu."
BUT I HAVE NOT TIRED OF SEARCHING, EDITH.
NEITHER THIS MASK NOR THE OTHERS.

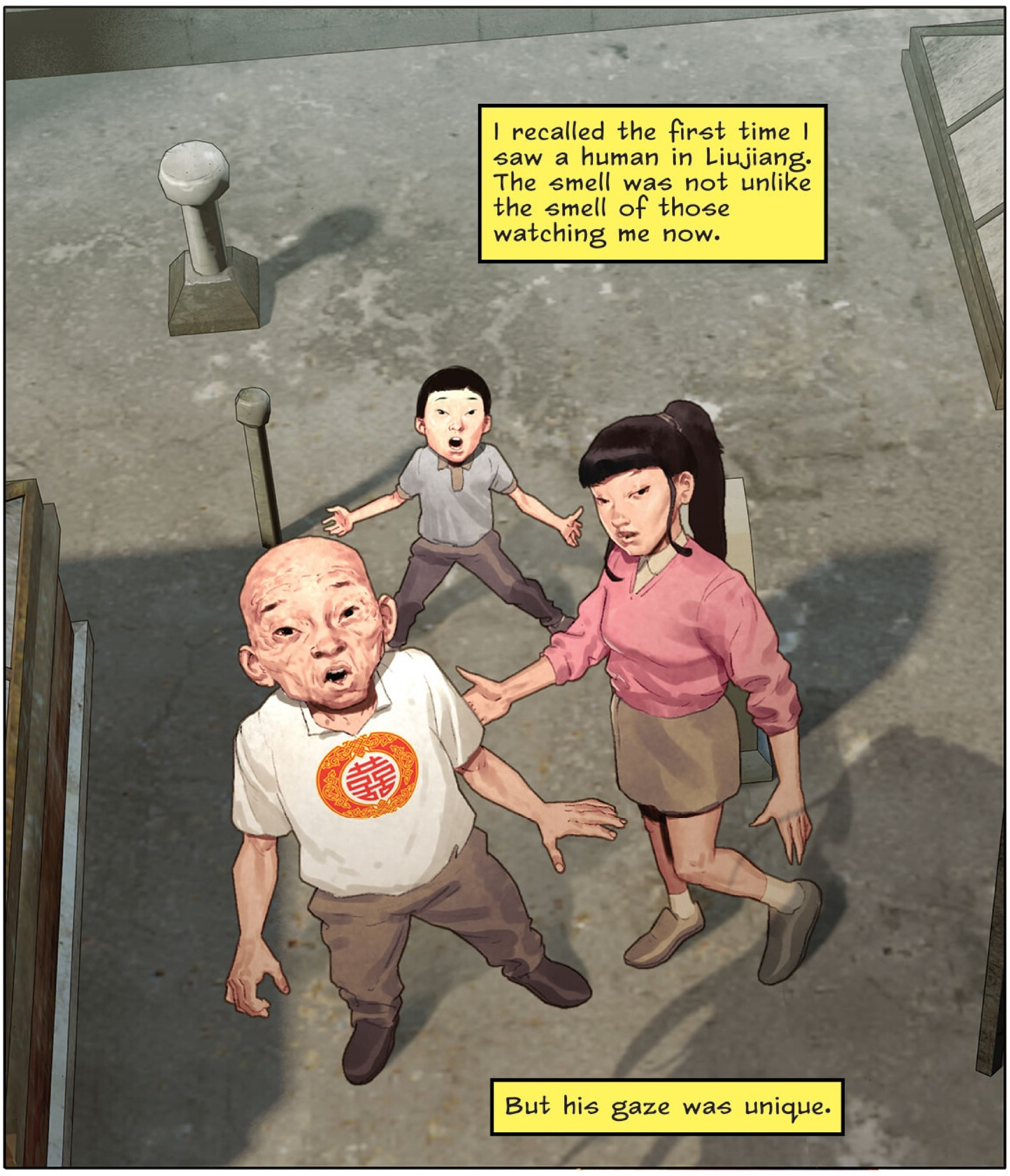
BUT EVERY TIME YOU HAVE TRIED THE OTHERS...
THE TRANSFORMATIONS WERE NOT... FAVORABLE.
THE TURTLE... THE BEAR...
THE BABOON.
THE STINGRAY.
DRAGONFLY.
THAT ALMOST KILLED YOU.
IF NOT FOR YOU.
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE READY?
TO CONTINUE THE SEARCH?
READY FOR ME.
OH, OF COURSE, MY BELOVED AND UNKNOWABLE MYSTERY OF NATURE.
YOU KNOW HOW TO TREAT A LADY, THOMAS.
COME CLOSER.
I KNOW MORE THINGS THAN A FEW OLD STORIES.

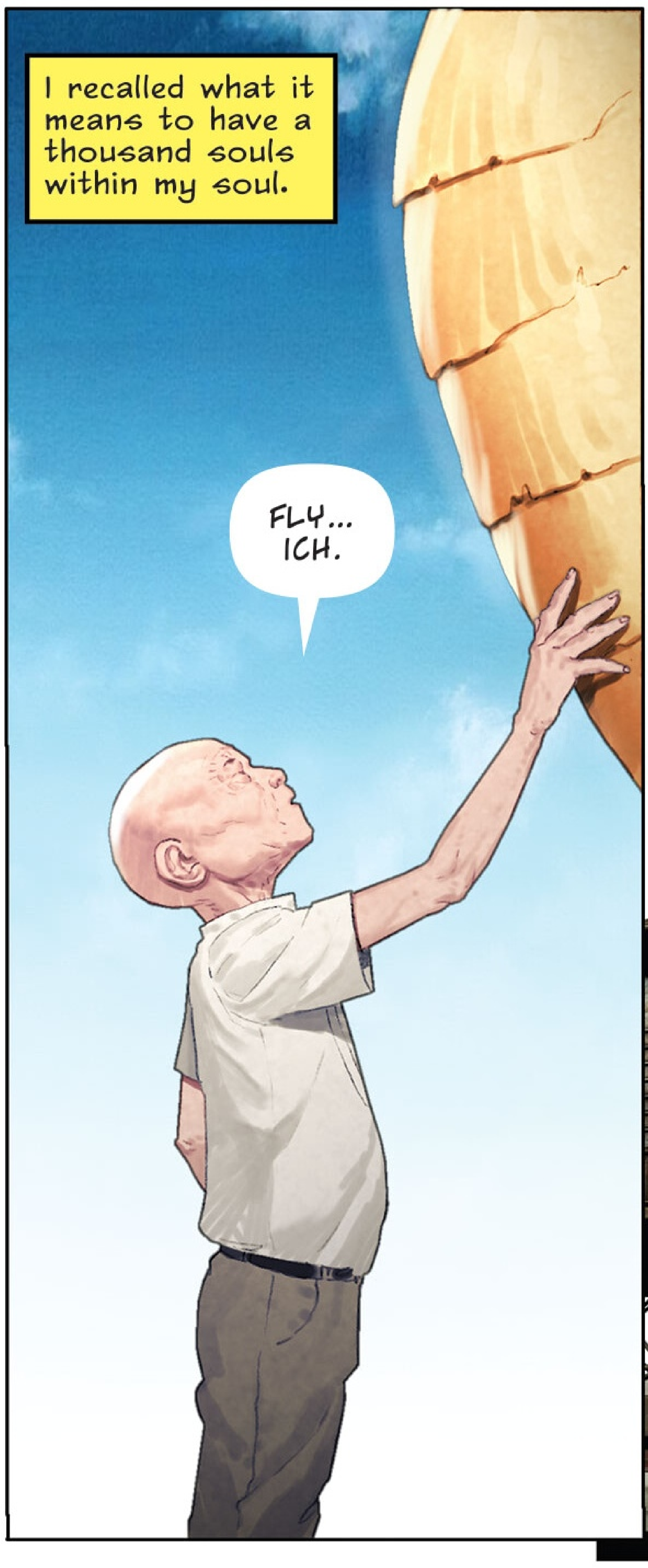
YOU KNOW WHAT YOU JUST TOLD ME CONTRADICTS EVERY REASONABLE IDEA ABOUT THE WORLD ITSELF, RIGHT?
I KNOW MANY THINGS, BOY.
BUT YOU KNOW THAT SPECIFICALLY, RIGHT?
YES.
HOW DO YOU EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE A WORD OF WHAT YOU SAID, THEN?
YOU KNOW IT'S BEEN NO MORE THAN A DAY SINCE YOU WERE A CREATURE THAT JUMPED ALL ACROSS THE SKYLINE AND LEFT MILLIONS OF DOLLARS WORTH OF PROPERTY DAMAGE, RIGHT?
THAT WAS... A DREAM.
DO YOU ALWAYS BLEED WHEN YOU DREAM?

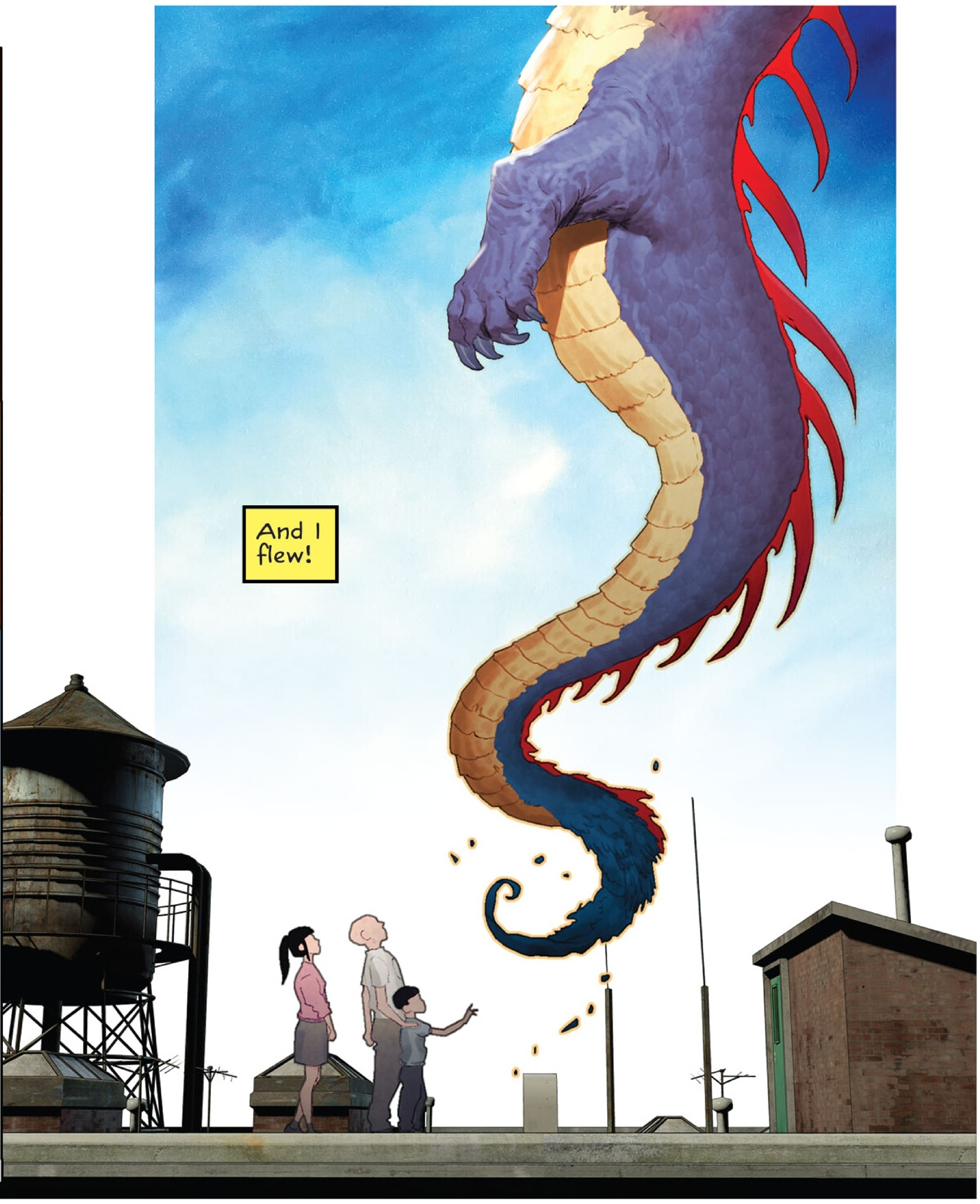
THEN I JUST HAVE TO WEAR THIS MASK TO SHOW YOU THAT WE ARE IN A MENTAL HOSPITAL AND NOT IN A FREAKSHOW, RIGHT?
I WOULD ASK YOU NOT TO DO THAT.
WHY? YOU DON'T WANNA SEE A MAN GOOFING AROUND WITH A DRAGON MASK ON?
NO.
BECAUSE WE DO NOT WANT A DRAGON DESTROYING THIS BUILDING.
OKAY. WE'RE GOING TO THE ROOF AND SETTLING THIS.

IN THE COURSE OF MANY GENERATIONS, WE HAVE COME ACROSS SOME PRIMORDIAL MASKS. THEY SUIT YOU.
THIS, FOR EXAMPLE, IS CALLED CHUNCHU.
THE LAST ONE WHO USED IT BECAME A GOD.
AND IT IS THE ONLY ONE, EVER, THAT HAS FACED THE DEVIL.
WE ASK, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, YOU USE EACH OF THESE MASKS WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY THAT YOUR SOUL DEMANDS.
BUT WHEN NOTHING HAPPENS, YOU'LL LET ME GO HOME. DEAL?
YOU WERE NEVER HELD HERE, BOY.
WE HEALED YOUR WOUND. WE OPENED YOUR EYES. BUT WE NEVER FORCED YOU TO STAY WITH US.
IF THE BOYS COULD SEE ME RIGHT NOW...
And then...
...it happened.
Insanity became reality.
But not only that.
Because, well, insanity became memories.

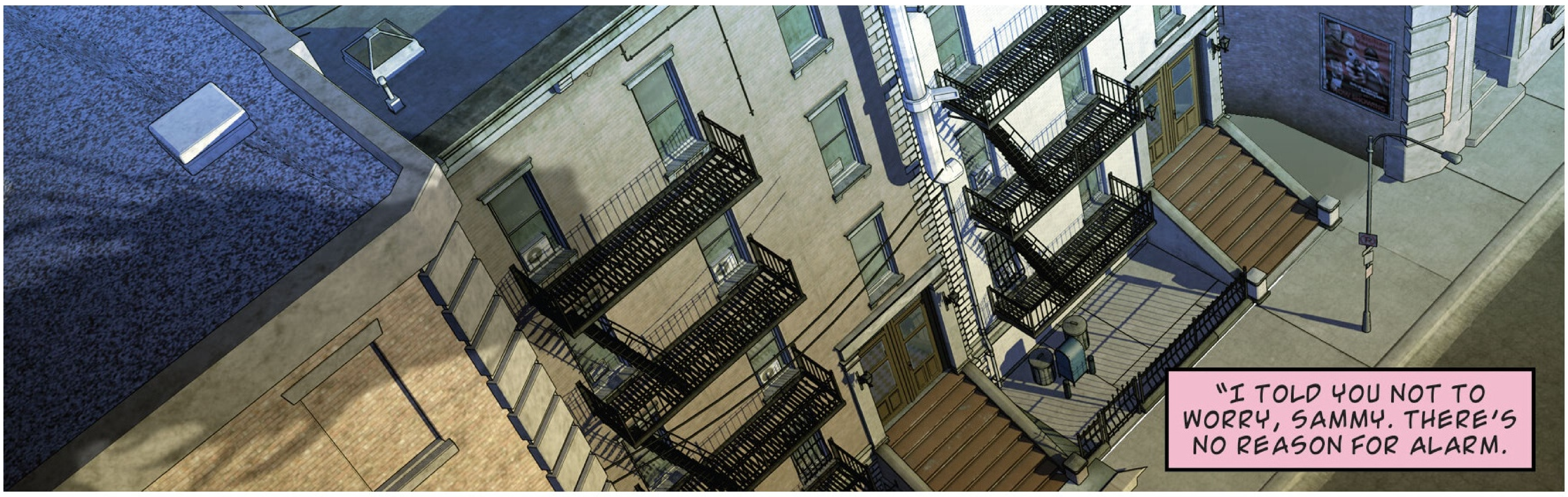

I recalled the warmth of the grass on the banks of the Yangtze River when spring arrives. I felt the peacefulness from a million years ago, in a Zhoukoudian cave that I once called home.

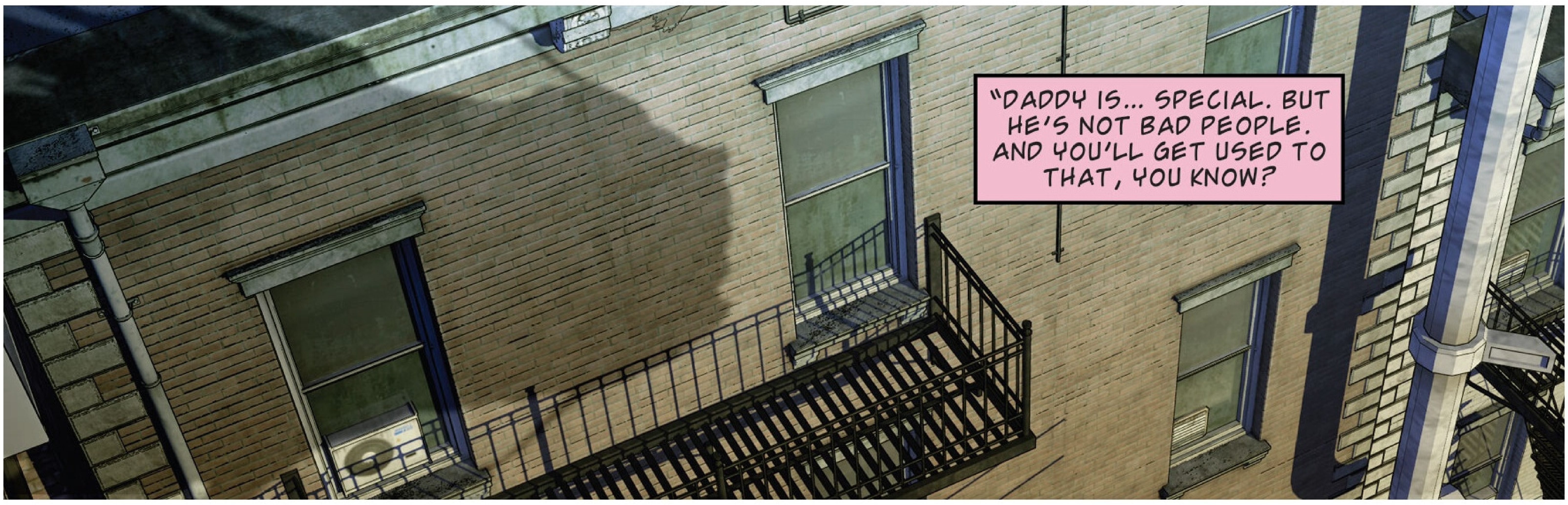

I recalled the first time I saw a human in Liujiang. The smell was not unlike the smell of those watching me now.
But his gaze was unique.

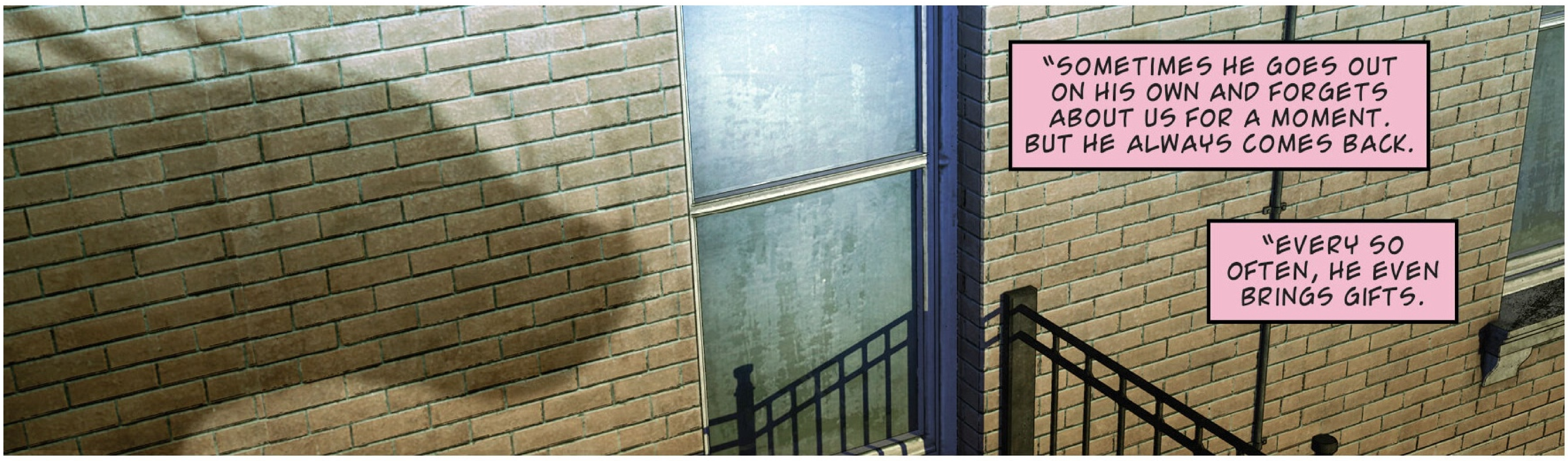

I recalled what it means to have a thousand souls within my soul.
FLY... ICH.

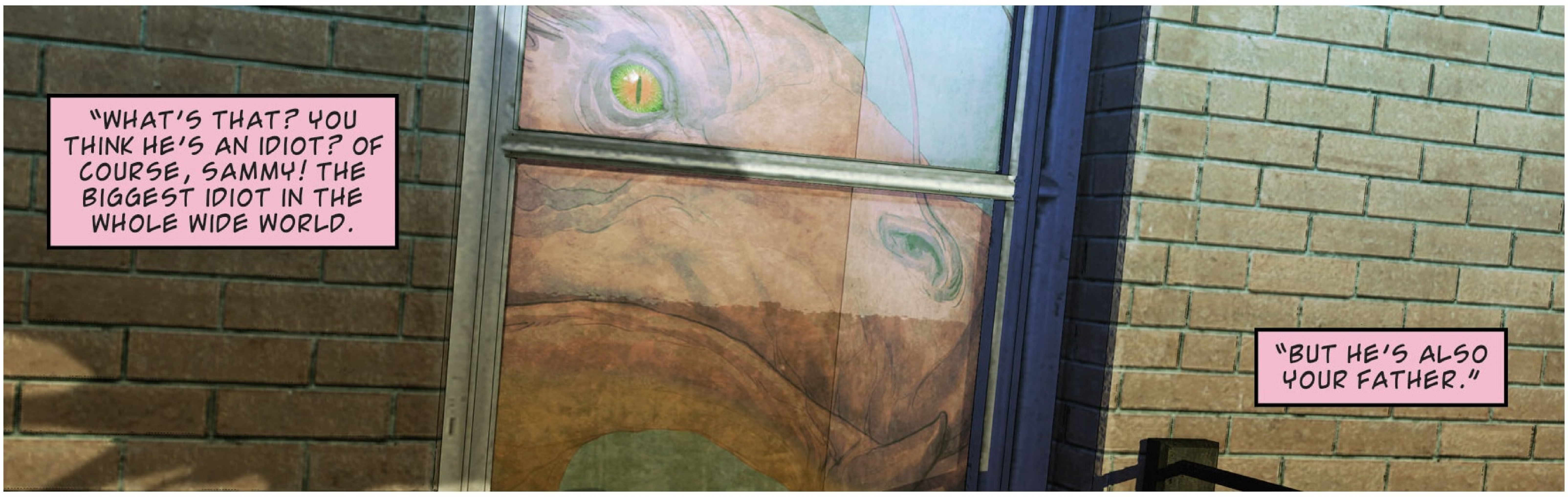

And I flew!

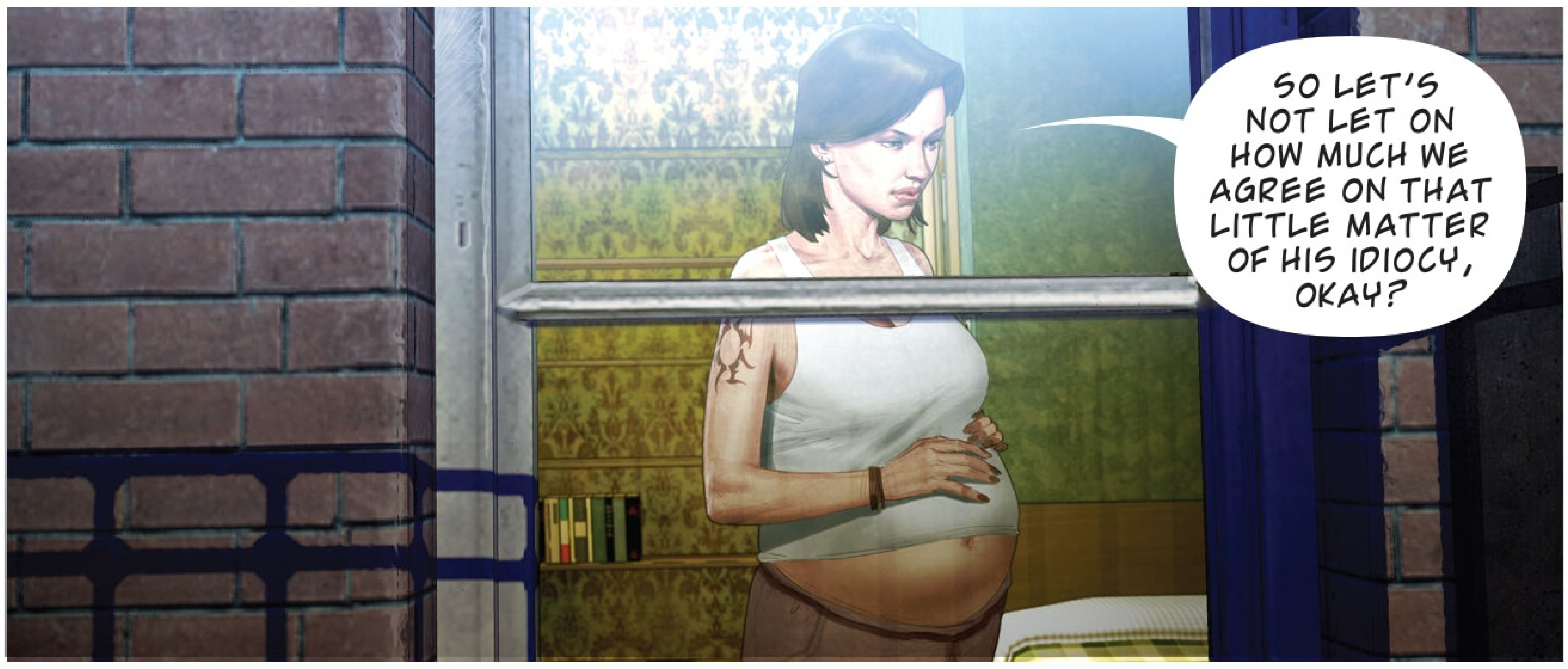
I flew as only those who've known cages can fly.
DON'T YOU FEEL AS IF A STORM'S APPROACHING, GEORGIE?
I WAS ABOUT TO MENTION THAT, MARGARET.
CALL 029 987 665
FOR RENT
PARKING


"I TOLD YOU NOT TO WORRY, SAMMY. THERE'S NO REASON FOR ALARM.


"DADDY IS... SPECIAL. BUT HE'S NOT BAD PEOPLE. AND YOU'LL GET USED TO THAT, YOU KNOW?


"SOMETIMES HE GOES OUT ON HIS OWN AND FORGETS ABOUT US FOR A MOMENT. BUT HE ALWAYS COMES BACK.
"EVERY SO OFTEN, HE EVEN BRINGS GIFTS.


"WHAT'S THAT? YOU THINK HE'S AN IDIOT? OF COURSE, SAMMY! THE BIGGEST IDIOT IN THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD.
"BUT HE'S ALSO YOUR FATHER."


SO LET'S NOT LET ON HOW MUCH WE AGREE ON THAT LITTLE MATTER OF HIS IDIOCY, OKAY?

SO SAMMY, HUH?
DIDN'T WE AGREE TO "NO GRANDPARENT NAMES?"
AH!

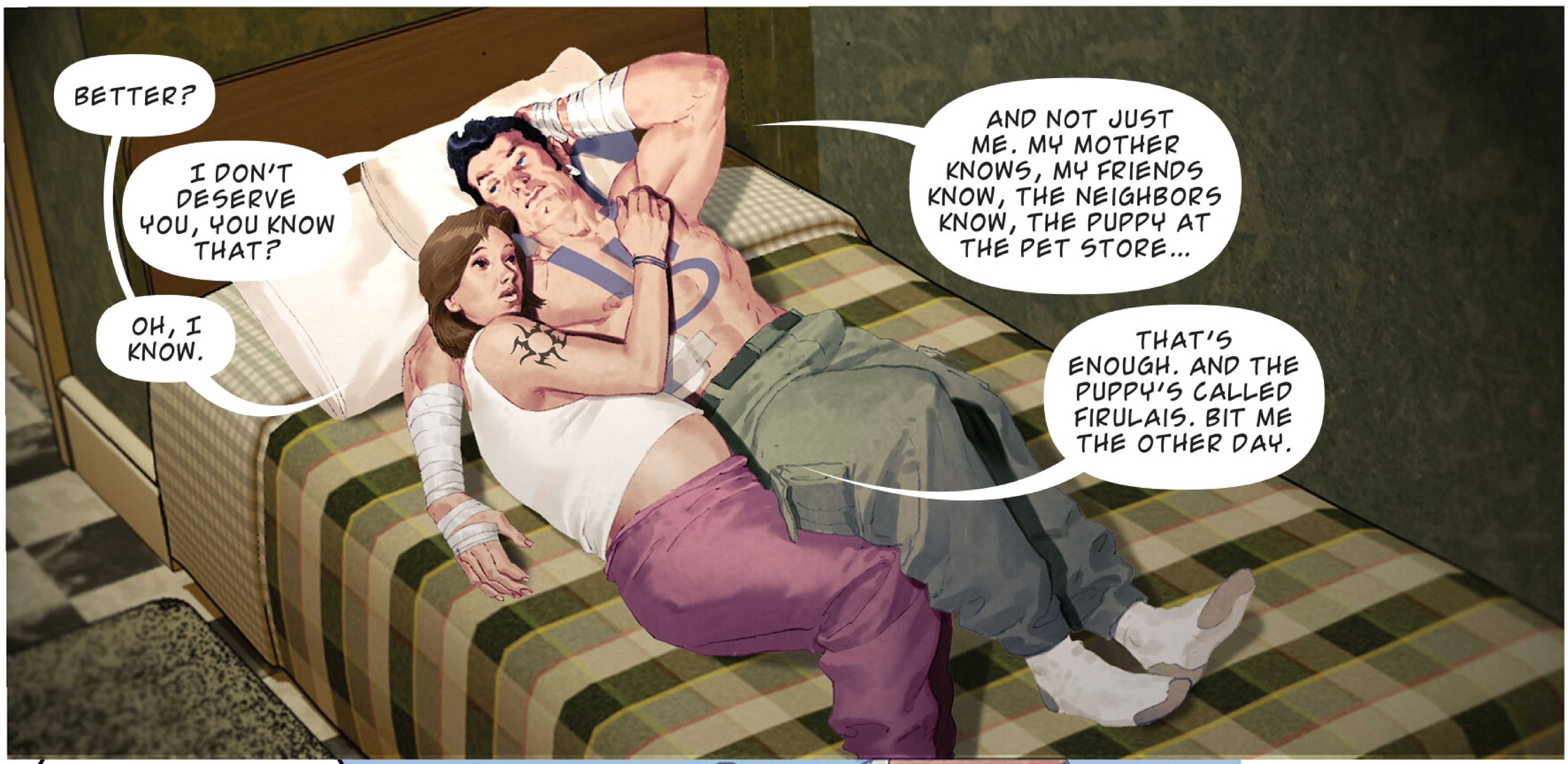
WHAT IF IT'S A GIRL, THEN WHAT?
LET ME REMIND YOU THAT YOUR MOTHER'S NAME WAS CLOTILDA.
CLANG
SON OF A BITCH!
WHOA, BABY! CAREFUL WITH THAT!
YOU'RE GONE FOR TWO DAYS WITHOUT WARNING, LEAVING ME WORRIED AND WITH A BABY KICKING ME AS IF IT WERE IN THE WORLD CUP FINALS AND THEN WHEN YOU FINALLY SHOW UP—!
—YOU COME IN THROUGH THE WINDOW?!
HEY. CALM DOWN. DEEP BREATHS.
I'M BACK.
YOU SCARED ME.
I REALIZE THE WINDOW THING WAS A BAD CALL.
THE WINDOW THING? IT'S NOT THAT.
I WAS SCARED OF LOSING YOU AGAIN, CURT.
I WAS SCARED I WOULDN'T FEEL YOUR EMBRACE ANYMORE.

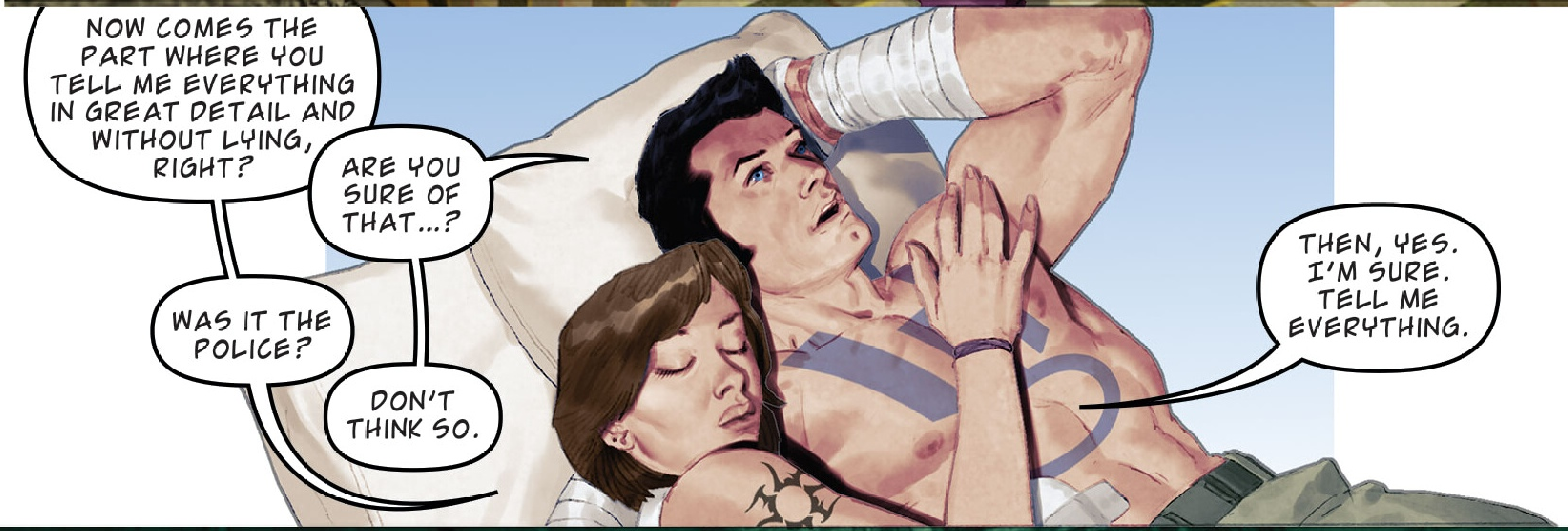
I'M SUCH A SHIT, *HUH?*
THE SHITTIEST.
AND I'VE TOLD YOU YOU'RE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AMORPHOUS BARREL THAT EXISTS ON THIS PLANET?
YOU'RE HALF TO BLAME FOR THAT, ASSHOLE.
I LOVE YOU, TOO.
FUCK YOU.
WERE YOU COOKING SOMETHING? I'M HUNGRY AS A DRAGON.
YOU SMELL LIKE ONE, TOO.
THOSE WHORES YOU SEE DIDN'T BOTHER GIVING YOU A BATH?
YOU KNOW THEY'RE ONLY INTERESTED IN GETTING DIRTY.
LET ME TELL YOU, THEY GET BETTER AND BETTER AT IT.
AND GIVE ME THAT. SAMMY'S HUNGRY.

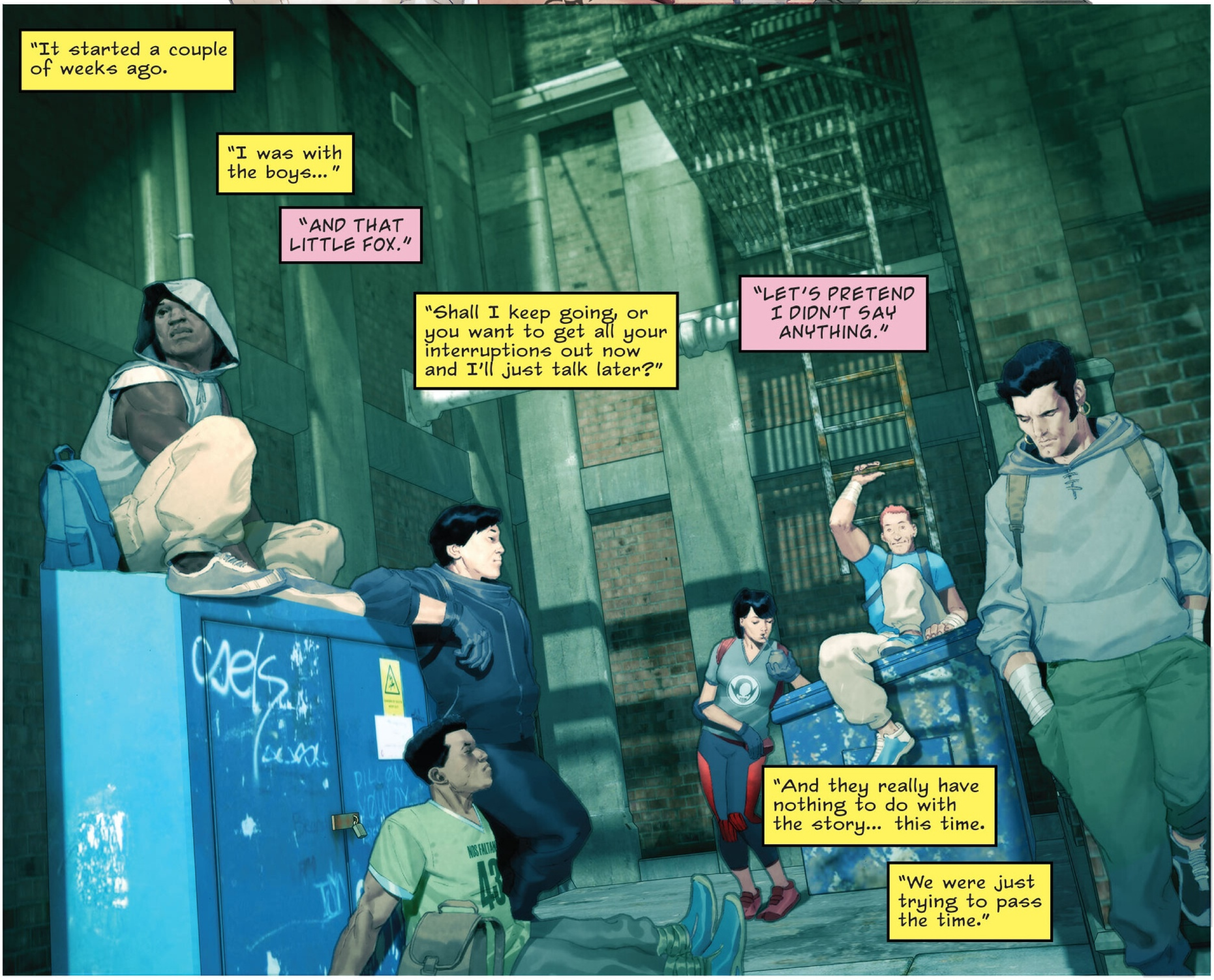
DID YOU BRING SOME MONEY, AT LEAST? OR SOME FOOD?
WELL...
CRAP.
LOVE! WHAT DID YOU DO? WHAT HAPPENED?
LEAVE IT, KATHERINE. IT'S NOTHING. IT'S...
I THINK I...
SHUT UP, CURT. YOU'RE ONE STEP AWAY FROM OPENING UP THAT WOUND AND WE DON'T EVEN HAVE GAUZE IN THE MEDICINE CABINET.
LOVE...
COME HERE, HONEY. AND DON'T MAKE THE SLIGHTEST EFFORT. YOU'LL SEE HOW MOMMY'S GOT CUDDLES THAT WILL CURE WHAT AILS YOU.
YOU'RE PERFECT.
TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT LATER. AND THEN I'LL KILL YOU.

DID YOU GET ANYTHING FROM MY LAST FORAY INTO THE WILD SIDE, DR. SHEEL?
THE BRAIN MAP REGISTERED CERTAIN ABNORMAL VOLTAGE FLUCTUATIONS IN ALPHA, BETA, AND DELTA WAVES. WHILE THE THETA WAVES...
...IF WE HAD PLUGGED YOUR BRAIN INTO A BATTERY DURING PROCESSING, YOUR THETA WAVES COULD HAVE SUPPLIED POWER TO A CITY BLOCK.
VERY FUNNY.
YOU KNOW THAT I AM ABSOLUTELY DEVOID OF HUMOR, MR. WOLF.
THEN YOU MIGHT WANT TO TRY TO BE A LITTLE MORE SPECIFIC, DR. SHEEL.
I THINK I HAVE FIGURED OUT THE ELECTRICAL FACTORS CAUSING MUTATION.
HOW CAN SCIENCE POSSIBLY DECODE WHAT GODS HAVE ONLY EVER WHISPERED, DEAR DOCTOR?
THE GODS SPOKE LOUD ENOUGH THIS TIME, MY LORD. AND THESE DEVICES HAVE LEARNED TO LISTEN.
AND WHAT HAPPENS IF THIS CUTE KANGAROO BECOMES A DEMON OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT?
WE WILL BE PUNISHED, OF COURSE.

123
89/V..
VERY WELL...
V4
...LET THE SCIENCE BEGIN.
DO YOU HEAR THE GODS LAUGHING, DR. SHEEL?
ALLOW ME TO SUGGEST THAT YOU GO TO HELL, MR. WOLF.


BETTER?
I DON'T DESERVE YOU, YOU KNOW THAT?
OH, I KNOW.
AND NOT JUST ME. MY MOTHER KNOWS, MY FRIENDS KNOW, THE NEIGHBORS KNOW, THE PUPPY AT THE PET STORE...
THAT'S ENOUGH. AND THE PUPPY'S CALLED FIRULAIS. BIT ME THE OTHER DAY.


NOW COMES THE PART WHERE YOU TELL ME EVERYTHING IN GREAT DETAIL AND WITHOUT LYING, RIGHT?
ARE YOU SURE OF THAT...?
WAS IT THE POLICE?
DON'T THINK SO.
THEN, YES. I'M SURE. TELL ME EVERYTHING.


"It started a couple of weeks ago.
"I was with the boys..."
"AND THAT LITTLE FOX."
"Shall I keep going, or you want to get all your interruptions out now and I'll just talk later?"
"LET'S PRETEND I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING."
"And they really have nothing to do with the story... this time.
"We were just trying to pass the time."

"And my stupid mouth decided to say..."
WHAT IF WE TRY TO REACH THE TOP OF THE LIBERTY BUILDING?
YOU DON'T WANT TO TRY TO REACH THE MOON, WHILE WE'RE AT IT?
LATER. FIRST, THE LIBERTY BUILDING.
WHY NOT?
BECAUSE IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, PERHAPS?
IMPOSSIBLE?
THEN LET'S DO IT!

"Reaching a certain point using the body as the only means to overcome obstacles in the most useful and efficient way.
"That is: *Parkour.*
"I don't have to tell you that I'm the absolute best at it."

YOU GETTING TIRED ALREADY, SLOWPOKE?
I'M GIVING YOU A HEAD START TO MAKE MY VICTORY EVEN SWEETER, EARRINGS.
SURE. AND THEN MOMMY WAKES YOU UP WITH A WARM GLASS OF MILK.
AHHHHH!
PARDON ME, MISS. AND DON'T FORGET TO WASH BEHIND YOUR EARS.
"And just like that, bad news arrived."
WHAT THE...?

WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS?
CORNER OF SANCHO QUARTO AND JAMES CRAIG. TOMORROW AT 1600 HOURS, ON THE DOT.
WHY DO YOU THINK THAT...?
A LOT OF MONEY.
THE REST I'LL EXPLAIN TOMORROW.
SHIT!
ON THE DOT.
"You know I'm curious by nature, Katharine.
"And that entrance, you have to admit, was pretty well done."

"They say curiosity killed the cat.
"In my case, the promise of big money did the trick. The following day, I was there."
CRESCENT ST
ONE WAY
PARKING
ONE WAY
STEP IN.
BUT...
STEP IN.
I SUPPOSE ANY QUESTIONS I MIGHT HAVE...
PLEASE WAIT. EVERYTHING WILL BE EXPLAINED IN DUE TIME.
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.
FOLLOW ME.
"So I followed him.
"Have you ever followed a floating toaster down a red carpet?"
"CURT..."
"I swear I'm not lying, not a single word! It happened exactly as I'm telling you."

"At the top of the stairs, there she was again."
"HOW ATTRACTIVE WAS SHE?"
"She was okay."
WE WERE WAITING FOR YOU, MR. MARTIN.
"CURT..."
FOLLOW ME, PLEASE.
YOU SLEPT WITH HER.
LOVE! I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU ABOUT HOW I ALMOST GOT KILLED BY MILITARY WEAPONS AND ALL YOU CARE ABOUT IS IF I SLEPT WITH THIS WOMAN WHO I'M NOT EVEN THE SLIGHTEST BIT ATTRACTED TO?
DID YOU SLEEP WITH HER?
NO!
MAY I CONTINUE NOW?
I'M ALL EARS.
THANK YOU.

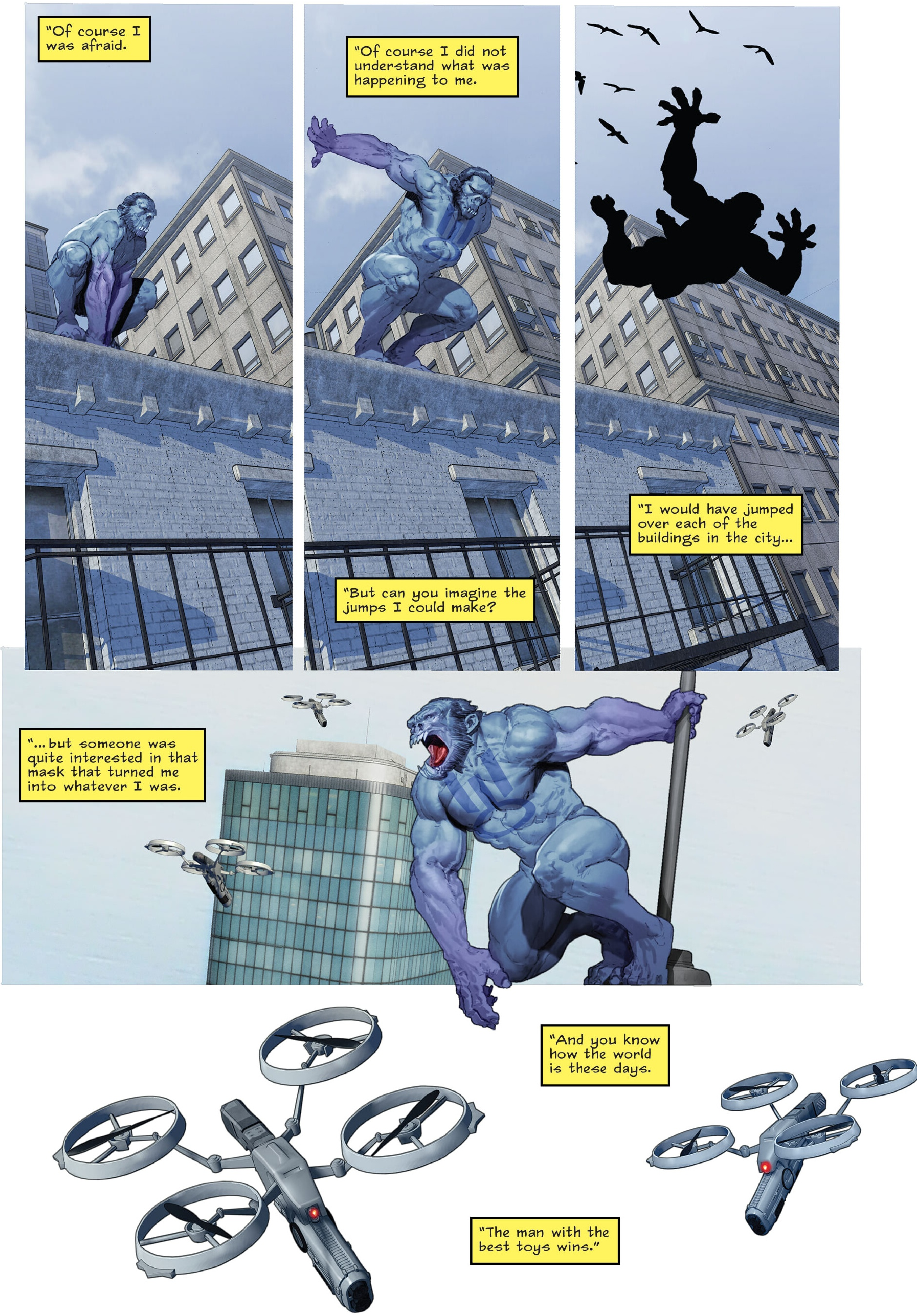
"You never think when you wake up that before nightfall you might find yourself face-to-face with the devil.
"Until you run into him, of course."
HAVE A SEAT, PLEASE.
"The first impression, however, is exactly what one expects from a moment like this.
"Fear. Like nothing else."

PARDON ME IF I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING THAT'S HAPPENING.
BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING THAT'S HAPPENING.
ONLY NATURAL, IN YOUR KIND.
AS MY TIME IS VALUABLE AND YOURS IS RUNNING OUT, I'LL GET TO THE POINT.
I NEED YOU TO STEAL SOMETHING FOR ME.
I FIGURED THAT WAS COMING.
I APPRECIATE THE LIMO TRIP AND ALL THAT, BUT I DID MY TIME IN THE SHADOWS AND I HAD ENOUGH OF IT.
WE HAVE MADE THE EXACT CALCULATION OF HOW MUCH IT WOULD TAKE TO ENTICE YOU TO COMMIT CRIMES AGAIN...
...IT'S IN THIS CASE.
WHEN IS YOUR FIRST BORN DUE, CURT MARTIN?
HOW DID YOU KNOW...?
WE KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU. WE'VE BEEN... WATCHING YOU... IN RECENT YEARS.
WE KNOW YOU'RE THE BEST AT WHAT YOU DO, AND THAT WHAT YOU DO CAN OBTAIN US AN OBJECT THAT NO ONE WILL MISS AND THAT WE GREATLY APPRECIATE GETTING.
WHAT IS IT?

Portulo
Mask Indi
1200
"A mask.
MetoPeto
Mask African
800
Tetomedin
"I was being paid a million to steal a simple and ordinary mask.
"They had everything ready: unlocked skylights, cameras aimed at the wall, alarms off for the five minutes I needed...
"Undoubtedly, the devil that hired me knows how to treat a friend."
COME TO DADDY...
WHAT THE...?
"At first, I thought it was some kind of protection. An alarm system that eliminates anyone who tries to steal the object.
"But soon, I knew it was something else.
"Have you heard of love at first sight?"

ARE YOU TELLING ME THAT YOU GOT TURNED ON BY TOUCHING A PIECE OF CLAY, BABY?
THIS ISN'T A PIECE OF CLAY. IT'S...
THE LOVE OF YOUR LIFE?
LEAVE IT.
HAVE YOU EVER FELT THAT YOU HAD BEEN IN A SITUATION BEFORE?
DéJà VU.
BUT DIFFERENT.
IT WAS AS IF...
"...as if the mask and I had been looking for each other all my life."
"YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYING MAKES ABSOLUTELY NO SENSE, RIGHT?"
"Then you better not listen to what comes next, my love.
"Because this is the part where the story gets complicated."

"Try to think of a bad migraine.
"And now add in all the toothaches in the world."
CRASH


"Of course I was afraid.
"Of course I did not understand what was happening to me.
"But can you imagine the jumps I could make?
"I would have jumped over each of the buildings in the city...
"...but someone was quite interested in that mask that turned me into whatever I was.
"And you know how the world is these days.
"The man with the best toys wins."

"...and then I came in through the window.
"Been a while since you interrupted me, love.
"Did you fall asleep? Or do you think I went crazy?"
"IT'S NOT THAT. IT'S...
"...YOU JUST TOLD ME THAT INSIDE OF YOU LIVES AN AEON-ANCIENT FORCE THAT ONLY YOU HAVE AND THAT WILL PASS DOWN THE NEXT... CHOSEN ONE—IS IT OKAY TO SAY CHOSEN ONE—ONCE YOU DIE?
"YOU JUST TOLD ME THAT IF YOU PUT ON MASKS YOU CAN BECOME... WHAT EXACTLY DID YOU BECOME?"
"Some kind of monster."
"OKAY. SOME KIND OF MONSTER."
"And a dragon."
"A CHINESE DRAGON THAT CAME FLYING INTO OUR WINDOW. THAT SOUND ACCURATE?"
"Yes. But you forgot to mention the flying robots that almost killed me."
"OH RIGHT. YOU ALMOST GET KILLED BY FLYING ROBOTS UNTIL... SOME SORT OF GUARDIANS OF TRUTH? BRING YOU BACK TO LIFE AND TELL YOU ALL THESE SECRETS."
"I knew it. That tone means you don't believe a word of it."
NO PARKING 8:30 AM TO 5:30 PM
"IT'S NOT THAT. IT'S... I'M GONNA MAKE MYSELF SOME TEA."

LOVE?
DO YOU FEEL...?
DON'T TOUCH ME, PLEASE.
HEY! THERE IS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, MY LITTLE WALLFLOWER. WE'RE TOGETHER. THAT WAS ALWAYS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING, RIGHT?
YES, BUT...
...WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE?

ME? WELL... I'M...
YOU DON'T HAVE THE FAINTEST IDEA.
"DO YOU REMEMBER THAT TIME WHEN A GUY TOUCHED MY ASS ON THE STREET?
"YOU PUNCHED HIM OFF THE GROUND. THE WALL HE COLLIDED AGAINST BROKE. AND MIRACULOUSLY THE GUY DID NOT DIE.
"AND WITH YOUR GANG? YOU ALWAYS GET TO THE PLACES WHERE OTHERS DON'T EVEN DREAM OF REACHING.
"AND DON'T TELL ME THAT YOU'RE THE BEST, AND THAT PARKOUR, AND ALL THAT BULLSHIT."
YOU'RE SPECIAL, CURT. YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN.
I...
DO YOU REMEMBER THE NIGHT I TOLD YOU THAT WE SEEMED TO FLY AS WE MADE LOVE?
"WELL..."

YOU KNOW THAT I'LL LOVE YOU NO MATTER WHAT, CURT. WHEN YOU WERE IN PRISON, I DIDN'T GIVE UP—EVEN FOR A SINGLE MOMENT. AND EVEN THOUGH IT'S CLEAR TO ME THAT YOU'RE HOPELESSLY IMMATURE AND CAN'T FACE THE WORLD AS A NORMAL PERSON...
WELL, LET'S TAKE IT EASY ON ME.
...I KNOW YOU'RE THE MAN OF MY LIFE. I CAN FEEL IT WITH EVERY FIBER OF MY BEING.
BUT WE HAVE OTHER PRIORITIES NOW, MY LOVE. WHAT GROWS IN MY BELLY IS REAL. WE HAVE TO CLOTHE HIM. FEED HIM. TEACH HIM HOW THINGS WORK...
AND OF COURSE SAMMY WOULD BE PROUD TO HAVE A DAD WITH SUPER POWERS.
BUT HE WILL BE PROUDER OF HAVING A DAD THAT'S ALIVE.
SAMMY?
YOU'RE TELLING ME THAT...
WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT LATER, HONEY.
WE NEED A MAN AT HOME, CURT. NOT A DEMIGOD. NOT A SUPERMAN. A MAN. WITH A JOB, NOT A MISSION.

THE MESSAGE'S COME THROUGH LOUD AND CLEAR, KATHY.
AND I AGREE FROM BEGINNING TO END.
NO MORE MYSTICAL DELUSIONS IN THIS HOUSE.
TOMORROW MORNING I'LL GET A JOB AT VITO'S MARKET. AND IN THE SUMMER, I'LL SIGN UP FOR NEW COURSES SO I CAN FINISH SCHOOL.
ARE YOU SERIOUS OR...?
WHY NOT? DO YOU SEE ME AS A LAWYER? OR AN ACCOUNTANT?
WELL, LET'S NOT TALK CRAZY.
"Now I'm going back to the "whoeverthatoldmanis" and I'll bring him back these masks. Never seen them before, if anyone asks.
"But there is one thing I want to make clear, Kathy. Actually two."
I WILL NOT LEAVE THE BOYS. LEAVING PARKOUR IS NOT ON THE TABLE.
AND WE'LL TALK ABOUT THE NAME SAMMY. ALL RIGHT?

DEAL ABOUT THE PARKOUR.
AND THE OTHER THING...
...WE'LL TALK.
OK. NOW...
...GOODBYE!
DON'T WORRY, SAMMY.
"WE DON'T NEED HIM TO BE *COMPLETELY* NORMAL."

NOW YOU SUFFERED THROUGH BETTER THINGS THAN THESE
AND YOU'LL WALK THIS ROUTE TODAY, WHEN IT GETS DARK...
PST!
HUH?
WOULD YOU MIND GIVING ME EVERYTHING YOU HAVE ON YOU, MISS?
COULD YOU REPEAT WHAT YOU JUST SAID? I HAD MY HEADPHONES IN AND...
GIVE ME YOUR VALUABLES. NOW.
OK.
SOCK
YOU CAN KEEP THE CHANGE, IDIOT.

IF YOU WANT A LITTLE MORE, YOU CAN COME LOOKING FOR ME.
BUT IF YOU WANT SOME ADVICE, I WOULD SUGGEST YOU GET GOING NOW.
La Reinga
WHAT A CITY...
NOT EVEN THIEVES CAN WALK ALONE AT NIGHT ANYMORE.
PUMPER NIC
WHAT WERE YOU SAYING TO OUR FRIEND WHO'S GONNA NEED A DENTAL PLAN NOW?
I...
EXACTLY. YOU.
YOU JUST STEPPED IN SOME SHIT, LADY.
I smell them.
HUH?
KRASH

I smell each and every thing around me.
And most of the smells put me in a foul mood.
AHHHHHHG!

FUCK...
I smell dead ends.
CRACK
AHHH!
MY ARM! YOU FUCKED UP MY ARM, MOTHERFUCKER!
I smell piss.
I'M...
The city smells of rotting garbage.
SOCK
UGH...

Smells of neglect. Of broken love. Of loneliness and desolation.
THIS IS THE PART WHERE YOU DON'T KILL ME, RIGHT?
Of patchouli.
HEY! THANKS FOR...
...SAVING ME. AND NOT EATING ME.
Eva smells like patchouli.
I don't think Kathy needs to know about this.
One last time, before stopping altogether. Nothing bad came of it.

...AND IF YOU LOOK CAREFULLY, THE MASKS DON'T HAVE A SCRATCH ON THEM.
NO.
EXCUSE ME?
I SAID NO.
YOU CANNOT GIVE UP BEING ICH.
OF COURSE I CAN. I'M DOING IT RIGHT NOW, RIGHT?
UNTIL TWO DAYS AGO, I HADN'T THE FOGGIEST IDEA OF THIS WHOLE MYSTICAL CHARADE OF MASKS AND BEASTS, AND NOW I JUST WANNA GO BACK TO THAT PEACEFUL IGNORANCE AS IF NOTHING EVER HAPPENED.
UNTIL TWO DAYS AGO, YOU DID NOT HAVE THE FOGGIEST IDEA THAT YOU WERE ICH, BOY.
HOWEVER, YOU WERE. AS YOU REMAIN TODAY. AND TOMORROW. AND SO ON UNTIL THE DAY YOU ARE GONE AND WHAT YOU HAVE INSIDE PASSES ON TO THE NEXT.
BECAUSE THAT'S THE WAY THINGS WORK IN THE REAL WORLD.
WELL, THEN IT'LL HAVE TO REMAIN INSIDE ME AS IT WAS BEFORE. CALM AND HIDDEN.

IT WAS NEVER... "CALM." IT WAS ALWAYS SCREAMING FOR YOUR ATTENTION.
IT MANIPULATED THE THREADS OF FATE TO ENSURE THE MASKS REACHED YOUR HANDS.
BECAUSE NEVER, IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND, HAVE THE MASKS MISSED A GENERATION WITHOUT FALLING INTO THE HANDS OF ICH.
THOMAS WOLF ORDERING YOU TO STEAL THIS MASK WAS THE RESULT OF THIS MANIPULATION OF FATE.
HOW DID YOU KNOW...!
I KNOW, BOY. JUST AS YOU KNEW YOU WERE ICH LONG BEFORE YOU KNEW.
SUPPOSE THAT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS TRUE AND THAT THE FACT THAT I REACHED THE BLUE MONSTER MASK IS PART OF A BIZARRE SPIRITUAL PLAN THAT INHABITS ME.
WHAT IS IT GOING TO DO NOW THAT I'VE DECIDED TO CONTINUE MY LIFE WITHOUT USING THIS POWER?
EVERYTHING IT CAN DO.
AND I RECOMMEND YOU DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE ABILITY OF WHAT INHABITS YOU TO FIND ANOTHER WAY.

I JUST WANT TO BE A NORMAL GUY.
YOU CANNOT.
YOUR HAND'S COLD.
MY NAME IS XUE, DO YOU REMEMBER?
IT MEANS "SNOW."
AND I CANNOT GIVE UP WHAT I AM EITHER.
I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE SAYING... I THINK.
BUT I PROMISED SOMETHING TO THE PERSON I LOVE MOST IN THE WORLD, AND I WILL KEEP MY WORD.
FATE CAN GO SCREW ITSELF.
I'M SORRY.
I'M SO SORRY.

I SWEAR THIS HAPPENED EXACTLY AS I JUST SAID...
SO YOU'RE LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD AND THE BIG BAD WOLF SAVED YOU.
I TOLD YOU IT WAS A WEREWOLF!
La Renga
THERE WAS A VERY GOOD FILM THAT MY OLD MAN WAS ALWAYS WATCHING. I THINK JOHN LANDIS DIRECTED IT...
AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON.
HEY! I DIDN'T KNOW THEY HAD TELEVISION WHERE YOU GREW UP.
AND I DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS MANDATORY TO MARRY YOUR OWN SIBLING IN IRELAND.
HELLO? A WEREWOLF JUST SAVED ME FROM BEING ASSAULTED, RAPED AND/OR KILLED. DON'T I DESERVE A LITTLE ATTENTION?
WE LIVE IN THE EASTERN BLOCKS, EVA. WHAT ELSE IS NEW?
NOS FALTAN 43
UHHH... THE WEREWOLF PART?
WHAT'S GOING ON, BOYS?
GARAGE
Sheetmetals ltd

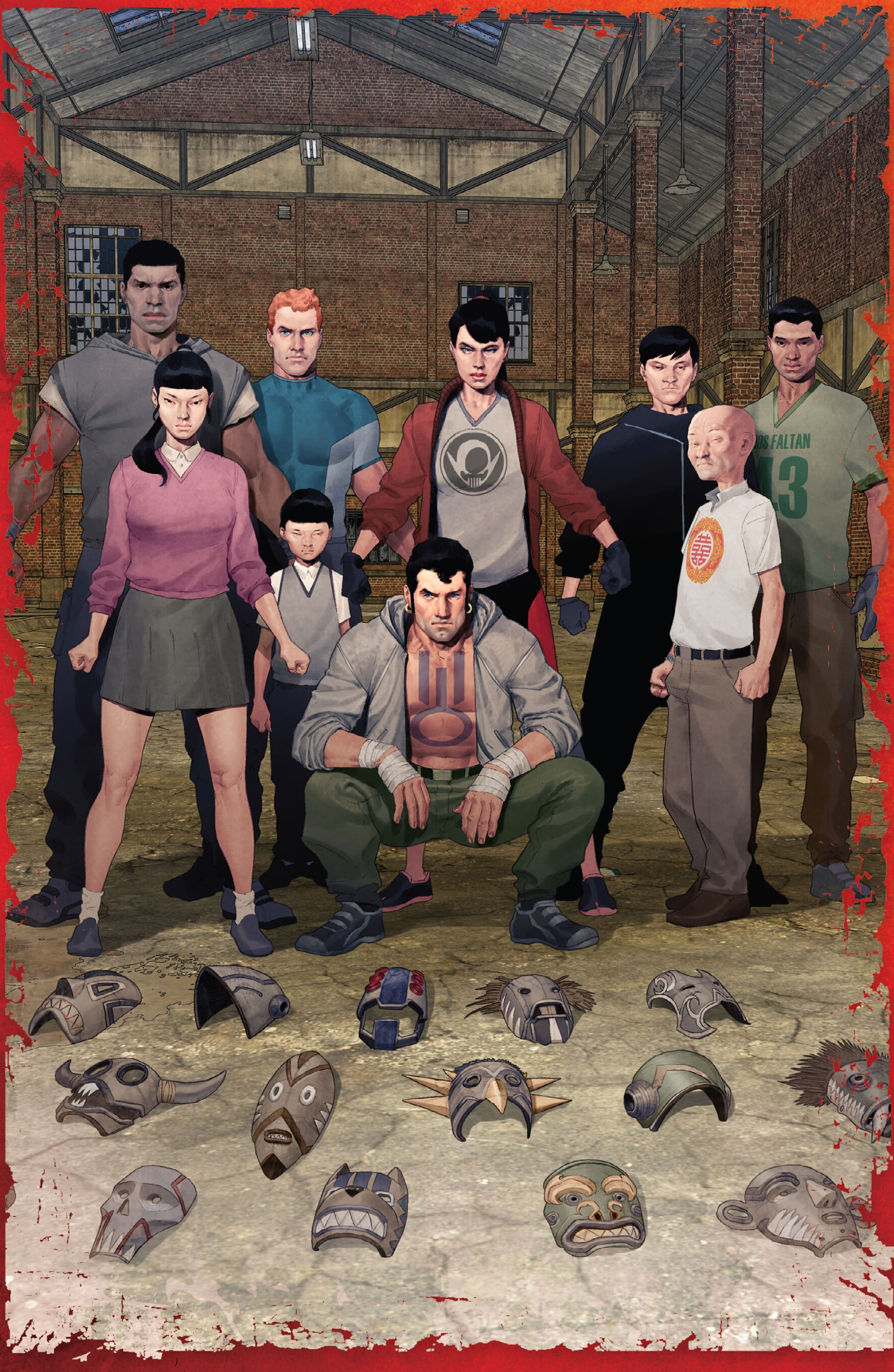
HEY, BRO! WHY THE LONG FACE?
DID SOMETHING HAPPEN TO KATHARINE OR... THE BABY?
DON'T EVEN JOKE ABOUT IT!
I WAS JUST ASKING. I'M NOT JOKING.
NOS FALTAN 43
SAMMY.
CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT'S WHAT KATHARINE WANTS TO NAME THE BABY?
MY DEEPEST CONDOLENCES, BROTHER.
I HOPE HE HAS STRONG FISTS, BECAUSE WITH THAT NAME...
LET US RAISE OUR PRAYERS AND HOPE IT'S A GIRL. THERE WOULD BE A CHANCE TO SAVE HER LIFE WITH A LESS IDIOTIC NAME.
VERY FUNNY. YOU DON'T KNOW HOW UPLIFTING IT IS TO MEET UP WITH FRIENDS LIKE YOU.
THAT FACE IS NOT BECAUSE YOUR CHILD'S GONNA HAVE A SHITTY NAME, EARRINGS.
IT IS.
IT'S NOT SO BAD, IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT.
HAVE YOU EVER FELT THAT YOU WERE BORN TO DO SOMETHING AND THAT YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME BY NOT DEVOTING YOURSELVES TO WHAT'S REALLY IN YOUR SOULS?
THAT YOU WERE SENT TO EARTH WITH A PURPOSE AND YOU'RE THROWING IT ALL AWAY, JUST LETTING TIME PASS?
FUTURE FATHER CRISIS IN ACTION.
YOU'RE NOT THINKING OF LEAVING KATHERINE BECAUSE YOU THINK YOU WERE BORN FOR SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN CHANGING DIAPERS AND SLEEPING TWO HOURS A NIGHT, RIGHT?
BECAUSE IF THAT'S...
NO, IT'S NOT THAT.

JUST THAT I STARTED THINKING ABOUT WHETHER LIFE IS JUST THIS, AT THE END OF THE DAY.
I MEAN... IS THERE NOTHING IN STORE FOR US, JUST AROUND THE CORNER? ARE THERE ANY POTS OF GOLD AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW IN THIS FUCKING CITY?
WELL... EVA SAYS THERE ARE WEREWOLVES.
THAT'S WHAT YOU SAID!
ASSHOLE.
WE... ALL OF US... COME FROM SAD FAMILIES, CURT. OUR PARENTS OR GRANDPARENTS ESCAPED FROM A HORRIBLE PLACE TO GET TO ONE THAT IS JUST BAD. BECAUSE IN A BAD PLACE THEY COULD AT LEAST SAVE THEIR LIVES AND THOSE OF THEIR CHILDREN.
I WOULD LOVE TO BELIEVE THAT WITHIN EACH OF US THERE IS A FLAME THAT... WHATEVER. BUT... WE ARE WHAT WE HAD TO BE. AND WE WILL DO WHAT WE CAN WITH THAT.
WE WERE BORN WITH THE BADGE "KEEP GOING" TATTOOED ON OUR FOREHEADS, CURT. AND I SWEAR IT'S THE BEST BADGE WE COULD HAVE.
AND AT LEAST WE HAVE EACH OTHER, RIGHT?
AMEN, SISTER.
IT'S A LUXURY TO HAVE YOU ALL, COMRADES.
AND EVA...
WHAT'S UP, CURT?
I just wanted to say "thank you."

AFTER THAT BIZARRE DAY IN WHICH CITIZENS CLAIMED THEY HAD SEEN A BLUE MONKEY JUMPING ON THE DOWNTOWN ROOFTOPS, THINGS GOT WEIRD AGAIN.
BREAKING NEWS
REC.
SOCIAL MEDIA'S BURSTING WITH MENTIONS OF A DRAGON FLYING OVER THE SKIES.
BREAKING NEWS
SPOKESMEN FOR THE MAYOR CAME FORWARD THIS MORNING TO CLARIFY THAT IT WAS ONLY ADVERTISING FOR A CHINESE CIRCUS TROUPE THAT'S IN TOWN AND WILL, APPARENTLY, LEAVE US WITH MOUTHS AGAPE.
AND WHILE THERE IS STILL NO DATE OR PLACE FOR THIS CIRCUS TO PREMIERE, MANY OF US WANT A GOOD UP-CLOSE SEAT TO SEE THESE WONDERS THAT MAKE US LOOK UP WHENEVER THE TRAFFIC'S JAMMED OR WE'RE WAITING FOR THE LIGHT TO TURN GREEN.
REAKING NEW
DRAGONS ARE THE FLYING ONES, RIGHT, GEORGIE?
BREAKING NEWS
RIGHT YOU ARE, MARGARET.
BREAKING NEWS
YOU WERE ON TV, LOVE!
BAH... I WAS ALL PIXELATED. IS THAT THE ONLY VIDEO THEY COULD GET? I THOUGHT EVERYONE HAS CELL PHONES WITH GOOD CAMERAS THESE DAYS!
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? THEY DENY IT BECAUSE OTHERWISE PEOPLE WILL START TALKING ABOUT IT.
CHINESE CIRCUS! THE GALL! IT WAS MY MAN FLYING OVER THE CITY, BITCHES!
WATCH YOUR MOUTH, LOVE. SAMMY CAN HEAR YOU.

SAMMY?
DO YOU REALLY LIKE THE NAME?
WELL... I...
WE'LL PAINT HIS ROOM ORANGE. ORANGE IS NEUTRAL. IF THE BABY'S A GIRL, WE'LL PUT UP THAT BEAUTIFUL PINK VINYL THEY SELL AT THE MALL. AND IF IT'S A BOY, WE'LL PUT UP STARS.
AS SOON AS THE CRADLE'S FINISHED, WE'LL OPEN THE WINE BOTTLE VITO GAVE YOU... I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE HE GAVE YOU THAT JOB... WE'LL CELEBRATE!
SAMANTHA TOLD ME THAT IF I TAKE A FEW SIPS OF WINE, IT RELAXES THE BABY. JUST DON'T DRINK THE WHOLE GLASS, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. WE ARE TALKING ABOUT THE ROOM FOR OUR BABY, LOVE!
WELL... ACTUALLY, IT'S YOU TALKING NONSTOP WHILE I TRY TO FIGURE OUT HOW THE HELL THIS THING IS BUILT.
YOU KNOW WHAT I COULD USE RIGHT NOW, ACTUALLY?
LOVE?

DID WE INTERRUPT?


OS FALTAN
13

KATH?
KATHY?
I AM MR. **THOMAS S. WOLF**. I HOPE YOU REMEMBER ME.
A FEW DAYS AGO, I ORDERED A SMALL JOB THAT HAS NOT BEEN COMPLETED. SADLY, I HAD TO PRESENT MYSELF TO CARRY IT TO TERM.
I REGRET THE SITUATION IN WHICH WE FIND OURSELVES, BUT YOU'VE LEFT ME NO CHOICE.
MEANING... ONE CAN'T ENTER A MAN'S HOUSE AND SAY "HELLO, I'VE COME TO ASK THAT YOU COME WITH ME AND WILLINGLY SUBMIT YOURSELF TO THE MOST ABHORRENT EXPERIMENTS YOU CAN IMAGINE."
SO WHAT ONE DOES IS STEP IN AND END THIS MAN'S LIFE.

"You know what they say about sparks?
"That one is enough to light the fires of hell."
NOW COMES THE PART WHERE YOU GET ANGRY AND WE BEAT YOU UNCONSCIOUS, SO IF YOU WANT TO AVOID THAT...
AHHH!
"Like I said.
"Let's go, the smell of roasting meat is starting to make me hungry."

Darkness protects me.
When there's no more reason to open your eyes. When the world has become a mouth that chews you up endlessly. When there is no hope of ever leaving the abyss...
...We can always embrace the darkness. For in the dark, at least, we have the privilege of not seeing when seeing hurts.
They say, those who've never seen a cuckoo bird, that cuckoos live in darkness. Poor fools. Do you see anything around me? All black—like death—all around me. No cuckoos.
Of course, nothing stops hurting. But the darkness at least makes it bearable.
The deep shoal.
The backs of all that lights our life.
The end of all stories.
The site you arrive at when the pain makes it irresistible.
Because it protects you.
Darkness protects.

But even there we can't escape everything.
There is always a light that kills.
COME ON, KATHY! JUST ONE MORE PUSH.
IT HURTS, LOVE.
I KNOW. YOU HAVE TO BE STRONG.
IT'S...
WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS?
REALITY, NATURALLY.
WELCOME, CURT MARTIN.
OR SHOULD I CALL YOU *ICH?*

HOW HAS YOUR STAY IN THE LAND OF DENIAL BEEN?
MS. EDITH FEARED YOU WOULD NOT RETURN. BUT SHE'S AN ANGEL.
ALWAYS WORRYING ABOUT EVERYONE.
WHERE...?
HERE, OBVIOUSLY.
WHERE ELSE COULD WE BE, WITH A SPECIMEN OF YOUR QUALITIES?
TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN. THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON AND ITS OTHER HALF. THE YIN AND YANG.
US.
MEETING YOU HAS BEEN OF INFINITE VALUE.
FINALLY, THE PUZZLE PIECES CAME TOGETHER IN THE RIGHT WAY AND I SAW WHAT I COULD NOT SEE.
ONCE I BECAME EVIL... BECAUSE INSIDE ME LIES EVIL.
AND YOU... YOU'RE ONLY EVERYTHING THAT HAS EVER BEEN PURE.

I COULD NOT TRANSFORM BECAUSE THESE MASKS WERE NOT MADE FOR ME. MY MASKS ARE OTHERS... POSSIBLY MORE ELUSIVE ONES.
KATHY...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT HER. MANY DIED IN THE FIRE, IT WILL TAKE A WHILE TO FIND HER.
I WANT TO SEE YOU IN ACTION.
MISKA, MUSKA...
ARE YOU SURE THE MASK...?
QUIET, WHORE!
TRANSFORM.
TRANSFORM!

PLEASE?
I SPENT A LIFETIME WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT.
ABSOLUTELY EVERY MINUTE OF MY EXISTENCE, WAITING TO ADMIRE THE MIRACLE OF THIS TRANSFORMATION.
AND NOW...
...AND NOW YOU'RE TELLING ME IT WAS ALL IN VAIN, YOU SON OF A BITCH?
THAT THESE MASKS SERVE NO OTHER PURPOSE THAN TO DRIVE ME CRAZY?
TRANSFORM, YOU BASTARD!
TURN INTO A WOLF, OR A FLY, OR A DINOSAUR, OR WHATEVER THE HELL YOU WANT!
BUT TRANSFORM!
LOVE.
EDITH?
I'M HERE.
I NEED YOU, EDITH.
I NEED YOUR TOUCH. YOUR SONG...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING, MY LOVE. LET ME HANDLE EVERYTHING.

I can feel the hate inside my guts.
It's like a mouse, or a wolf, rummaging inside me.
It puts its nose in the corners where memories burn and whispers: "never again."
And, as if it were a virus that has not been discovered yet, Hate runs through me and seizes every space of my soul.
I have been Curt Martin. I've been called Ich.
But now I am *Hate*.

IT'S NATURAL.
YOU'RE YOUNG. STRONG. ARROGANT. IMPETUOUS.
HOW COULD YOU NOT BECOME HATE, WHEN EVERYTHING YOU WERE HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM YOU AND YOU WILL NEVER AGAIN BE WHAT YOU COULD HAVE BEEN?

ALL OF US HAVE LOST WHAT WAS OURS, ICH.
THEY HAVE BURNED OUR OFFSPRING.
THEY HAVE TORTURED EVERYONE WE LOVE.
THEY HAVE DENIED US OUR FREEDOM.
WE ALL TURNED OUR BACK ON THE STRENGTH THAT DWELLS WITHIN US.
AND THE FORCE THAT LIVES WITHIN CAME BACK AGAIN, AGAIN AND AGAIN, UNTIL WE LEARNED TO ACCEPT IT.
WILL YOU ACCEPT THE POWER YOU HAVE INSIDE?

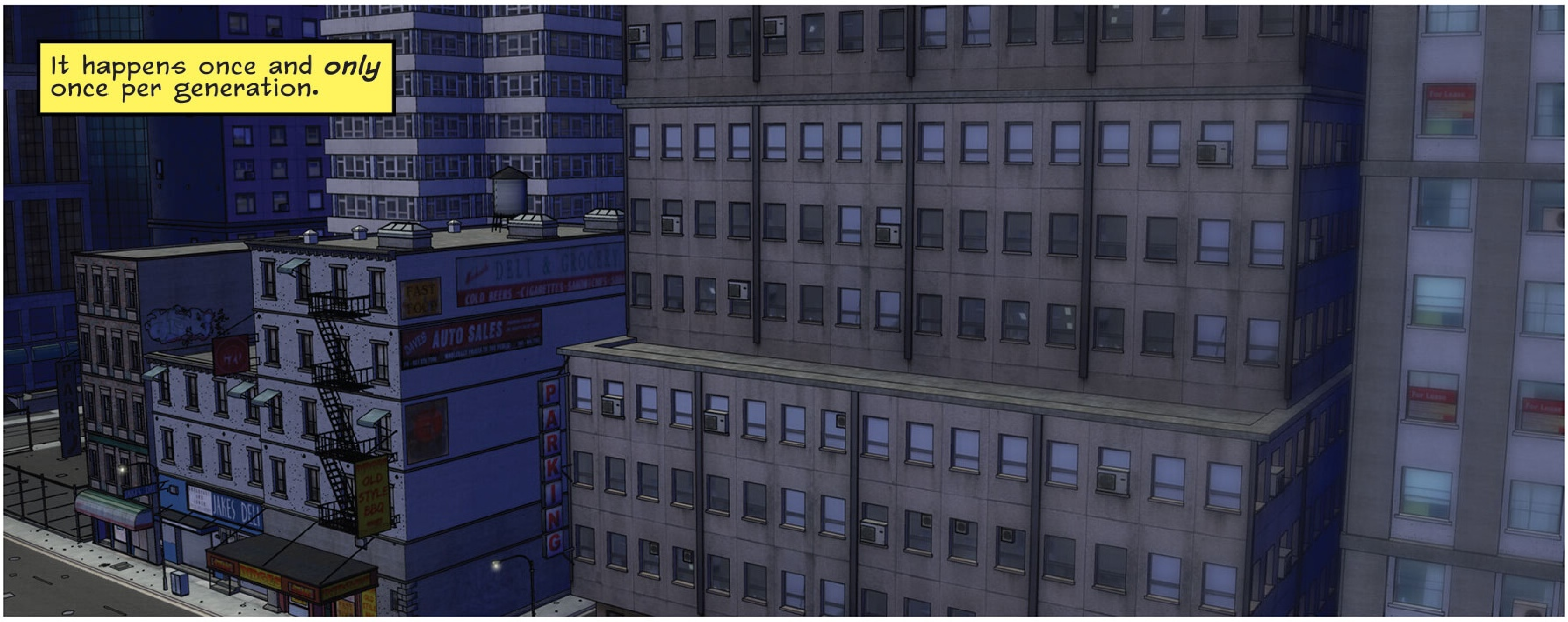
YES...
...I ACCEPT.
WELL, THEN THERE'S ONLY ONE THING LEFT TO DO.
YOU NO LONGER HAVE HATE.
"Now, like all of us, thy name is Ich."

Four times my body melted in an unspeakable way.
Four times I left my humanity to become a beast, a dragon, a wolf, and a God.
Four times I felt myself explode and rearrange.
But this is the first time I understand what's happening to me.
GRIARRRGH!
And I accept it.

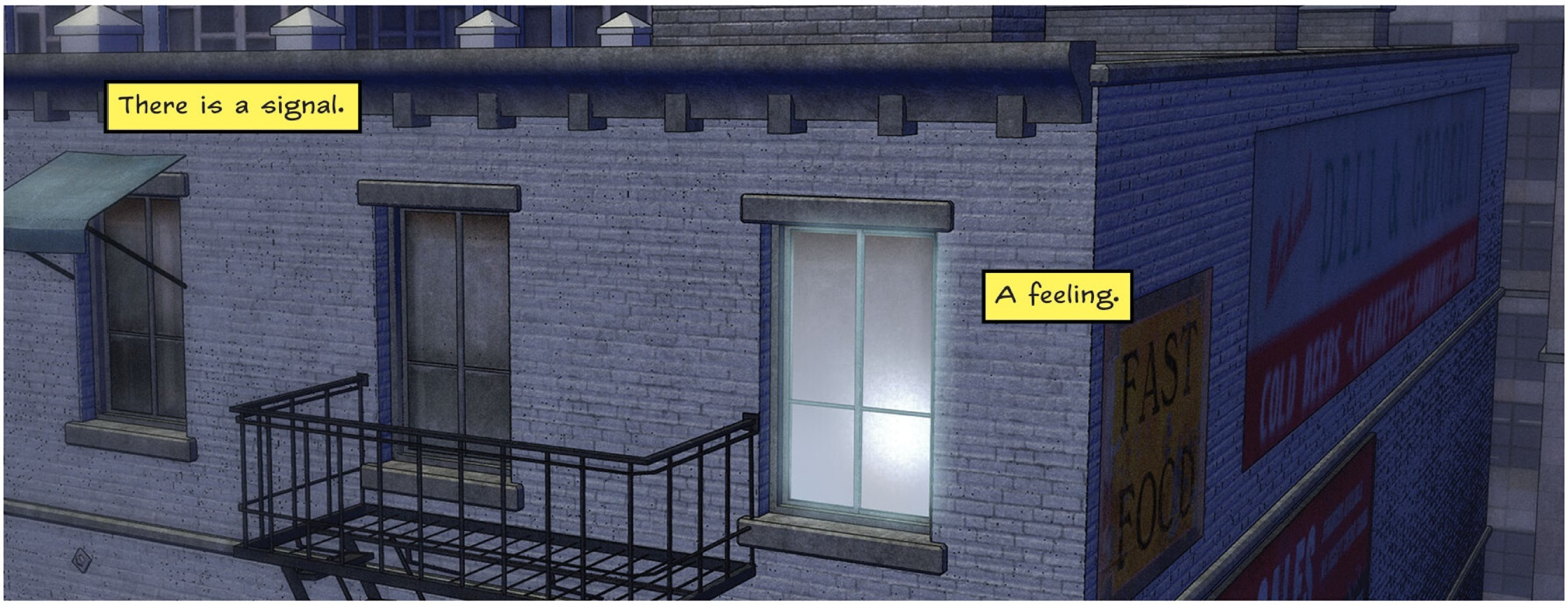
I destroy.
I seek.
I smell.
WHAT THE DEVIL...?
"DEVIL" YOU SAY, MY DEAR SPLENDOR OF NATURE?
WHAT I SEE IS A *GOD*.
AND BEFORE THIS GOD I WILL KNEEL.

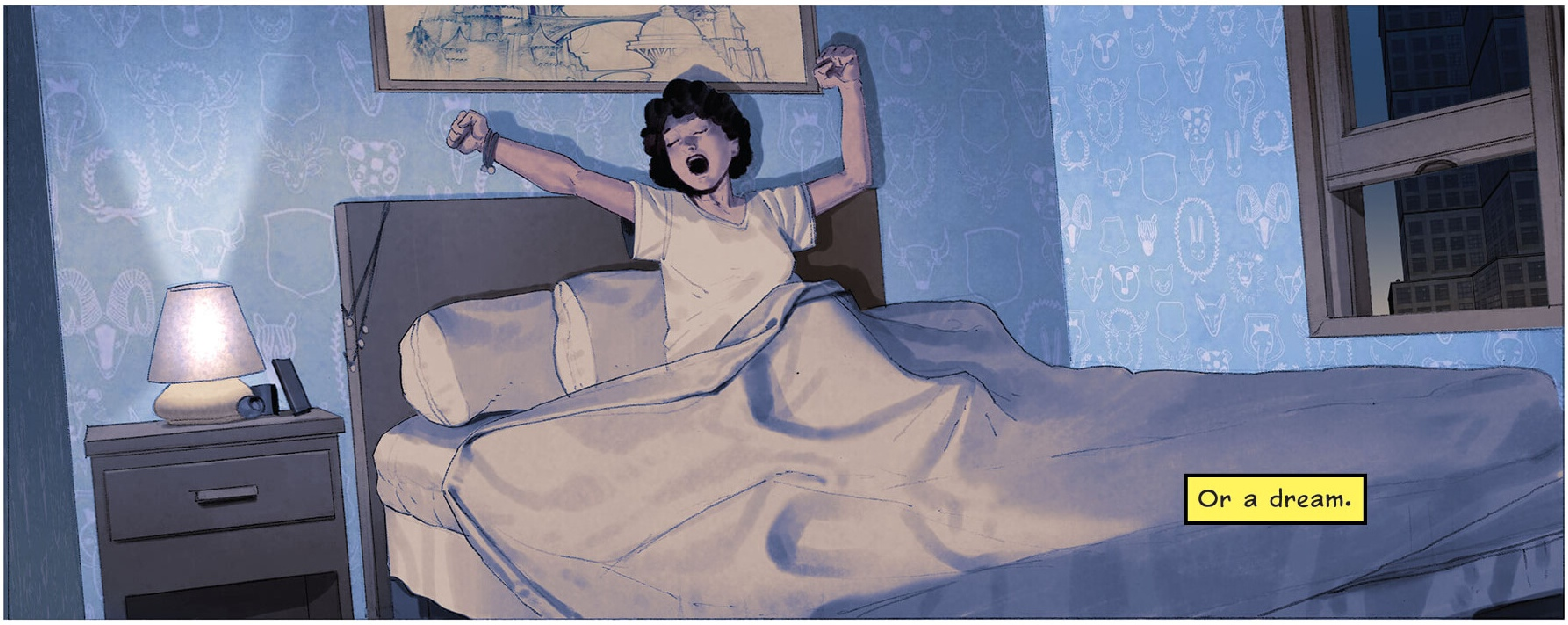
I LOVE YOU.
RED ALERT IN MR. WOLF'S BEDROOM! I REPEAT: RED ALERT...
IT'S POINTLESS, EDITH...
...NOTHING... CAN BE... DONE...
...AGAINST **FATE**.

NO...
...WHY?
WHY DO YOU NOT KILL ME?
AM I NOT A WORTHY SACRIFICE?
It's not that.
Nothing can be done against fate.
And my fate includes you, Thomas S. Wolf.


It happens once and *only* once per generation.
DELI & GROCERY
AUTO SALES
PARKING
FAST FOOD

DELI & GROCERY
FAST FOOD
AUTO SALES


There is a signal.
A feeling.
DELI & GROCERY
COLD BEERS
FAST FOOD


Or a dream.

The truth is that each custodian knows what they have to do.
And they do it.
They've never been to the place they are going.
But none of them will be lost.

Everyone knows where to go.
They've gone countless times.
Although this is the first time.
Some have guarded their relic for a couple of decades.
Some people have found theirs, perhaps among old boxes from a grandfather they never knew.
And there are those that never knew what they were holding until tonight. And they do not ask questions.
The steps of one become a murmur when mixed with the steps of many.
And this is actually the story of many.
They carry their gift to one just born.
Because tonight they all know that Ich has entered this world.

My name is *Ich*.
It means mask.
I lost everything I had.
OS FALTAN
13
I can be all that exists.
And my story is about to begin.

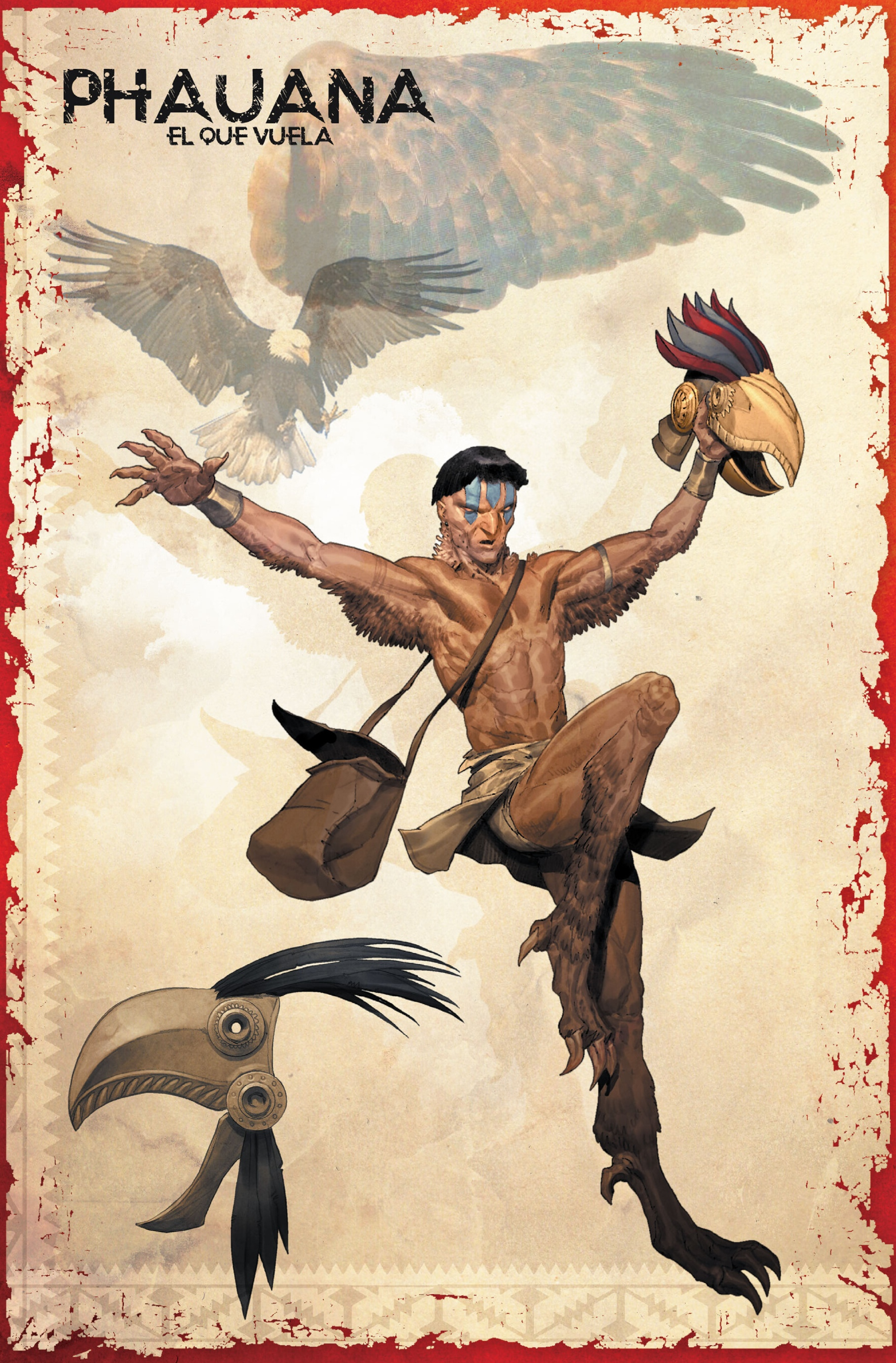
IT'S HERE, ISN'T IT, GEORGIE?
CERTAINLY, MARGARET.
I TOLD YOU A STORM WAS COMING, GEORGIE.
SAY NO MORE, MARGARET.
THE END.

ICH

SCULPTURE BY **MARTIN CANALE**

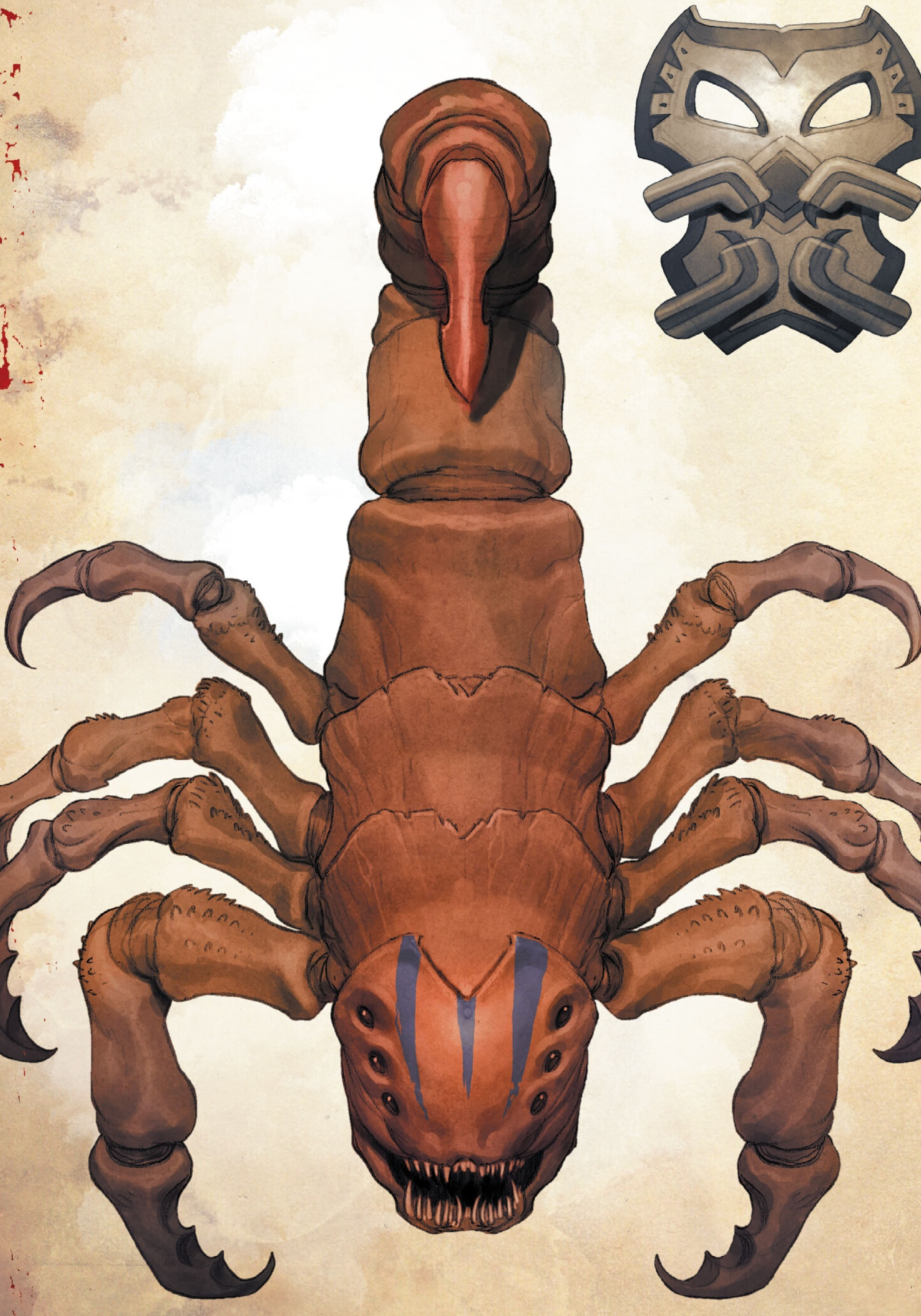
PHAUANA

EL QUE VUELA



PPAKKINA

EL DESTRUCTOR



A COLLECTION OF MASKS OFFERS THE INCREDIBLE POWER OF MYTHICAL BEASTS TO THOSE WHO WEAR THEM, BUT POWER ATTRACTS CORRUPTION AND THERE ARE THOSE WHO CAN'T RESIST ITS PULL.

As Spanish soldiers seek new lands and people to conquer, a warrior called Ich harnesses the ancient power of the masks in a battle that pits the Indigenous people of Latin America against the encroaching Spanish empire. But can one man, even with this power, hope to beat back the massive forces of the conquering Spaniards?

Then the scene shifts to a cold, shiny, and somehow even more ruthless future in which a group seeks to use the power of the masks for personal gain. Will a new warrior emerge, one that can lead the people against the forces of oppression?

Combines *Brutal Nature* and its sequel, *Brutal Nature: Concrete Fury*, by Luciano Saracino and Ariel Olivetti into one collection!

"Filled with powerful dialogue, a perfect villain, and some very stunning artwork, this comic has the right tones between lyricism and violence, between mystical and brutal." —*GeekDad*

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